RÉPUBLIQUE FRANÇAISE
Liberté
Égalité
Fraternité

IGPDE

ACTION PUBLIQUE

Recherche et pratiques

Varia

Special Issue #1

Hors-série 2023

ACTION PUBLIQUE

Recherche et pratiques

Varia

Special Issue #1

Publishing director
Virginie Madelin

Editor-in-chief
Marie Ruault

Co-Editor-in-chief
Edoardo Ferlazzo

Editorial secretary
Delphine Mantienne

Graphic design
Studio graphique des ministères économiques et financiers (SG-Sircom)

Layout
Desk

This special issue was prepared with the assistance of the Translation Centre of the French Ministry of the Economy, Finance and Industrial and Digital Sovereignty.

If you would like to consult past issues of *Action publique. Recherche et pratiques*, go to https://www.cairn.info/revue-action-publique-recherche-et-pratiques.htm

Open access quarterly publication – ISSN 2647-3135 (online)

To subscribe to our mailing list, please send an e-mail to:
recherche.igpde@finances.gouv.fr

Social networks:
Twitter @Igpde_recherche
Youtube.com/igpde

Subscribe to the magazine:

Table of contents

5 **Editor's Foreword**
VIRGINIE MADELIN

9 **[Cross-views] The nuts and bolts of citizen participation**
TYPHANIE SCOGNAMIGLIO AND MARION CARREL

21 **[Survey] Bercy's *Secrétariat général*: institutionalization and transformations (2000-2020)**
EDOARDO FERLAZZO, MARCEL GUENOUN AND JEAN DEZERT

37 **[Survey] Training for reform? Public service schools in the face of calls for modernization**
OLIVIER QUÉRÉ

47 **[Survey] From administered prices to composed prices: public pricing methods and developments**
FABIEN ÉLOIRE AND JEAN FINEZ

Editor's Foreword

VIRGINIE MADELIN

Virginie Madelin
Director of the Institut de la gestion publique et du développement économique

This very first special issue of *Action publique. Recherche et pratiques* puts together a selection of papers from the various issues published over the last three years. It presents four publications reflecting the diversity of the themes explored in the journal. This issue has been designed with the aim of making academic work in the various fields of public management accessible to as many people as possible, and of making visible the concrete actions undertaken by public players.

With a strong desire to put the transformation and reform of public action in France into comparative perspective with other foreign cases, the *APRP* journal is an ideal forum for highlighting research findings that enable us to discuss the convergences and divergences between national political-administrative models.

Enjoy your reading!

Éditorial

Ce tout premier Hors-série en version anglaise de la revue *Action publique. Recherche et pratiques* rassemble une sélection d'articles issus de différents numéros parus lors des trois dernières années. Il présente quatre publications témoignant de la diversité des thématiques explorées dans la revue. Ce numéro a été conçu avec la volonté de rendre accessibles au plus grand nombre les travaux académiques s'intéressant aux différents champs de la gestion publique et de rendre visibles des actions concrètes entreprises par les acteurs publics.

Souhaitant profondément mettre en perspective comparative la transformation et la réforme de l'action publique en France avec d'autres cas étrangers, la revue *APRP* est un terrain privilégié pour valoriser des résultats de recherche qui permettent de discuter des convergences et des divergences entre modèles politico-administratifs nationaux.

Excellente lecture !

Cross-views: The nuts and bolts of citizen participation

Typhanie Scognamiglio and Marion Carrel

The 13th issue of *Action publique. Recherche et pratiques* looks at the theme of citizen participation, which is increasingly central to public action. The interview between Typhanie Scognamiglio, head of the Interministerial Centre for Citizen Participation (CIPC) and Marion Carrel, a sociologist, presents the different meanings, methodologies and contemporary results of the citizen participation approach. The other two papers in the issue look at the possibilities of applying citizen participation to the various stages of the budgetary process in public organizations, and at autonomous public organizations dedicated to public participation, analyzed in the Canadian context.

https://www.cairn.info/revue-action-publique-recherche-et-pratiques-2022-1.htm

"Cross-views"* ("Regards croisés") *is a section based on an organised dialogue between a person from the academic world and someone from the public administration on a subject of common interest. The dialogue takes the form of a video interview published on the IGPDE YouTube channel. This interview is also transcribed and edited in the form of an article published in this magazine.

The nuts and bolts of citizen participation

Typhanie Scognamiglio and Marion Carrel[1]

Typhanie Scognamiglio is head of the Interministerial Centre for Citizen Participation (CIPC) within the Interministerial Directorate for Government Transformation (DITP).

Marion Carrel is Professor of Sociology at the CeRIES laboratory, University of Lille, and co-director of the Democracy and Participation Scientific Interest Group.

Watch a video of this interview on the* Action publique. Recherche et pratiques *website:

https://www.economie.gouv.fr/igpde-editions-publications/regards-croises

1 This interview was conducted by Edoardo Ferlazzo, Head of Department, Comparative Public Management, IGPDE Research Office. It was recorded on April 22, 2022.

Broadly speaking, what are the aims of citizen participation?

Marion Carrel: The aims of participation are many and varied. Sometimes it can serve particularly ambitious goals such as strengthening democracy, which ties in with the idea that the representative system that has been in place since the late 18th century is somewhat elitist. To take one example, there are currently no manual workers in the National Assembly and non-manual workers make up just 4.6% of members. Yet together, these two groups account for half of France's working-age population. In this case, the aim is to bring more voices and perspectives into the debate and to empower the least qualified members of society.

On a separate but equally ambitious note, participation can prove helpful in managing and strengthening public policy-making. Here, the idea is to involve citizens – with their expertise as public-service users and their lived experience more generally – in assessing policy and suggesting ways to improve its design and implementation.

Of course, participation can also be exploited for more ethically dubious aims, such as lending or restoring credibility to politicians or rubber-stamping decisions made behind closed doors. In cases like these, participation is exploited as a way to ease pressure on decision-makers – to give the green light to controversial decisions that are already set in stone. Here, the aim of public debate is to bypass conflict and strengthen the image or legitimacy of the people making the decisions.

Participation can also be used for communication purposes. This is not necessarily a bad thing. But pursuing participation with the sole aim of better communicating with citizens reduces the whole thing to a top-down exercise. It also overlooks the transformative potential of participation in terms of making democratic processes more direct (sharing debate and decision-making power with citizens) and more inclusive (ensuring this power is shared more equally among the population).

On top of this, participation can serve community-focused objectives. You see this a lot in urban policy, where participation is merely about building community integration and cohesion. In other words, the idea is to help citizens express themselves as eloquently, and possesses the same mastery of language, as government bodies, policy-makers and elected representatives. Here, the emphasis is on activities and programmes focused on civic education and community-building. Again, this is not necessarily a bad thing. But this kind of reductive approach also neglects the two aims I mentioned earlier.

Those arguing in favour of citizen participation might also be seeking to exercise authority, or even have authoritarian aims in mind. Take the example of how referendums can be exploited: there is arguably something populist or authoritarian about seeking the consent of citizens to, say, erode the rule of law.

In sum, participation can serve all kinds of aims and objectives. But if these are not discussed and made absolutely clear, the message can get obscured. This is precisely the criticism often levelled at participatory processes: the ultimate aim is not always evident.

Typhanie Scognamiglio: As Mrs Carrel mentioned, the aims of participation are to strengthen democracy and to create spaces where citizens can contribute to public policy-making and, in some cases, decision-making. Participation is also about making public policy more relevant and effective. This also ties in with the question of legitimacy: when you involve people in shaping a policy or arriving at a decision, it is seen as more legitimate because it reflects more diverse perspectives.

Our work at the DITP encompasses some aspects of participation. I should make clear exactly what I am talking about here, since "participation" covers a vast array of methods, aims, objectives, scopes, scales and more. Specifically, we work on participatory exercises related to proposed reforms, bills and action plans. This is not an exhaustive list, but it gives a flavour of the aims of the exercises we support.

In 2021, we contributed to France's national debate ahead of the Conference on the Future of Europe, which saw citizens set out their aspirations for the European Union in 2035. Although this is a topic that calls for immediate decisions and action, it was very much a forward-looking exercise. Participatory approaches can also be used to address controversial issues that polarise opinion. By allowing an exchange of views to take place, decision-makers can build a more structured picture and understand where the points of agreement and disagreement lie.

Of course, participation is more than just a tool to guide decision-making. Citizens can also be consulted on aspects of public policy implementation, such as how to allocate financial support more effectively and efficiently. But there is an important distinction between user consultation and citizen participation. They are not the same thing. A participatory exercise brings in citizens who might not necessarily have a direct

interest in the subject. Then, for instance, you can ask them how a given public policy could best be implemented. Citizens can also be involved in public policy evaluation. In this kind of exercise, the idea is to evaluate the stated aims of a policy at the design stage, and then to determine whether the policy has delivered the intended benefits for its target audience.

How does citizen participation differ from other concepts such as deliberation?

Marion Carrel: The distinction between participation and deliberation is crucial. The concept of deliberation is tied to Habermas and his theory of the public sphere: it is about bringing people together in public to debate, to exchange opinions and arguments, to arrive at an informed view and, perhaps, to make the right decision on this basis. Whereas, strictly speaking, participation has to do with sharing decision-making power with citizens, including aspects of direct democracy. In this case, power is shared through votes, referendums, randomly selected assemblies or groups, and so on. These two approaches – participation and deliberation – can coexist in participatory processes. By extension, the term "participation" is typically used to describe processes where decision-making power is not really shared – processes that are more akin to deliberation. The term itself has become far too broad in meaning.

It is also important to remember that both approaches can be used in conjunction. Participatory processes with a voting component, such as participatory budgeting and referendums, should preferably include a period of deliberation – when competing arguments are set out in the public sphere and a democratic exchange of views takes place – before the representatives make their decision. Conversely, building a decision-making component into a deliberation exercise – i.e. actively setting out to make a decision and involving citizens in this decision if possible – can prove quite beneficial.

A prime example is the Citizens'Assembly process that led to the legalisation of abortion in Ireland. Over the course of several months, a group of 99 citizens spent their weekends considering the issues and hearing input from experts. In the end, they proposed amending the Constitution to make abortion legal. Unlike what happened with the Citizens'Climate Convention in France, the proposed amendment was then put to the population in a referendum, receiving the support of 66% of voters. Personally, I find this kind of interplay between debate and decision-making especially valuable.

Typhanie Scognamiglio: It is true that there are differences between the two approaches. But there are also differences in terms of the initial undertakings and the point at which citizens are brought into the process. For instance, if the aim is to involve citizens in assessing or examining an issue, or in pinpointing the problem that needs fixing, then this kind of work happens long before a decision is made. And the undertakings will differ markedly compared with, say, a participatory exercise three months before a bill comes before parliament. It all hinges on how the exercise is framed. In other words, the undertakings depend on the purpose and timing of the consultation process, and on whether a decision will be made at the end of it. This is not always the case: some consultation exercises are run by public bodies or administrations and are not necessarily tied to a political decision.

Our job is to help the project sponsor select an approach that best fits the aims and purpose of the exercise and determine the most appropriate undertakings. If the consultation takes place two years ahead of a decision, there is no point promising participants they will see immediate results, because that would be untrue. But if it happens just before a decision, it is much easier to make clear and explicit undertakings.

How do you go about choosing one participatory method over another?

Marion Carrel: We have seen a whole host of new tools and methods emerge in the past two decades. There is no one-size-fits-all method for a given objective. Rather, it is a question of considering the various options to see what benefits they offer. Some approaches, such as citizens'assemblies, participatory workshops and discussion groups, revolve around debate and deliberation. Others, like referendums and participatory budgeting, are more focused on voting and direct democracy. On top of this, there are methods geared towards considering new questions or looking at social concerns from new angles. In working-class neighbourhoods, discussion groups are a good example of this kind of approach to evaluating a particular problem or issue. In this case, the idea is to use communication techniques and formats that are accessible to all,

such as art, film and drama – and more generally images and the spoken word as opposed to the written word.

Public bodies and non-profit organisations have a wide range of options open to them, and professionals with experience in running these kinds of exercises are readily available. As for which method is the best fit for a particular aim or objective, the question remains open. Imagine you want to tie the process to a decision, and you want the participatory exercise to have an impact on, say, environmental concerns in the short, medium and long terms. In this case, you would need to make sure that, at the very least, the people behind the initiative reply relatively quickly to the proposals and explain exactly what has been done with them before any change of direction happens. The answer lies not necessarily in the method itself but in how you frame the exercise. Both aspects need to be considered together. This has been the direction of travel in thinking and practice over the past 20 years.

Typhanie Scognamiglio: I absolutely agree that proper framing will lead to the right method. That is why we do not rank or categorise methods and tools. When we are asked to design a process, we take the project sponsor's objectives as our starting point. If the aim is to foster broad debate and capture a wide range of opinions, we might opt for an online consultation or other, similar tools that serve this particular objective. Conversely, the sponsor might prefer a hybrid approach, with a chance for people to make their views known followed by a period of deliberation. Or they may simply want to focus on deliberation. In this case, the priority is to design a process that lets citizens form a collective opinion based on their unprompted views and observations.

In practice, we rarely design a process using a single method. We tend to adopt hybrid approaches on the basis that each method has its advantages and disadvantages. In the end, covering all the stated aims is an exercise in taking the best features of each method and making them work together.

How can people on the margins of society be included in participatory processes?

Marion Carrel: Involving these groups in debate and decision-making is one of the main aims of participatory democracy. It is not an easy task. There is a lot of work to do on this front. These people will only get involved if the messaging and communication are right, if they understand the purpose of taking part, and if they feel their contribution will make a difference. Format and participant selection require careful consideration. One way to create a mini-assembly or a more representative group is to select participants at random. But the people who are selected actually have to turn up. Random selection can involve a lot of subsequent support work. Ultimately, we are all capable of serving the general interest, regardless of education or wealth. This principle that we are all equal goes back to the very origins of Athenian democracy.

Another option is to work with non-profit organisations and social workers – the volunteers and professionals who are embedded in the community – to bring excluded people into participatory processes. But this is not as simple as it sounds because, often, participatory approaches tend to prioritise direct engagement with ordinary citizens. Working with non-profit organisations is not always the obvious choice. I see this as a major challenge for the years ahead. Using diverse formats is another key consideration: the exercise needs to be as inclusive as possible, with a strong focus on the spoken word and on explaining the meaning of words and the substance of the issues. When you work with communities in extreme hardship as I do, you have to modulate your language. It is always challenging for people from different backgrounds to talk to one another and reach a mutual understanding. There are, however, some proven methods and moderation techniques inspired by popular education and bottom-up strategies. One approach involves putting people facing discrimination or hardship, or who harbour deep mistrust towards public institutions, into small groups of like-minded peers, so they can build their knowledge together before engaging in the debate.

Typhanie Scognamiglio: Reaching and engaging those on the margins of society – in all their diversity – is a challenge almost as old as citizen participation itself. Our job is to find ways of bringing people into the fold. First and foremost, the mandate given to citizens must be clear. To check whether this is the case, ask yourself what would persuade you to attend a 9pm meeting to discuss a topic in which, on the face of it, you have no direct interest? To make it worth the effort, you would need to know why you have been asked to attend, what purpose your contribution will serve, how much time you will need to give, what undertakings the project sponsor has made, what guarantees there are in terms of consultation, and

so on. Together, these details form the "mandate" given to citizens involved in the participatory exercise. A clear mandate is one of the key drivers of participation.

The accompanying media campaign is equally important for bringing excluded people on board, as are grassroots efforts to reach out to these sections of society, through prefectures, local authorities, non-profits and other organisations embedded in the community.

Consistency is another way to increase engagement. If people see participation as a series of isolated exercises, with no overarching framework or vision of public policy-making, then they will be less inclined to take part. It takes time and perseverance to earn citizens'trust.

Do I have an off-the-shelf solution for reaching these sections of society? No. It is more a question of combining best practices. For example, random selection ensures that the full diversity of viewpoints is heard in a debate. It is better at achieving this aim than, say, a call for volunteers, which is more likely to attract only those who have an interest in the topic or have already formed an opinion. But it is not a perfect solution because it only reaches a handful of people.

The challenge is to design a participatory model that achieves two aims. First, the output needs to be robust enough to inform public policy-making or decision-making, which takes time. And second, it needs to give everyone an opportunity to contribute. Right now, there is no ideal model.

Marion Carrel: When engaging with excluded people, it is also important to talk about topics that are relevant to them and their lives, and to use personal narrative. In France, the dominant view of citizenship and public debate calls for people to leave their differences at the door and directly adopt a general-interest view. Yet people on the margins of society – those whose voices are largely unheard in public debate and political representation – prefer to talk about their everyday experiences and concerns focusing on concrete subjects. This is an important and complex challenge to overcome when the aim is to build a collective viewpoint. One option is to pay people for taking part, based on the principle that they are devoting several days of their life to discussing a general-interest topic, and that the professionals in the room are being paid for their time. Paying participants validates their contribution and rewards them for giving their time to a collective cause.

Typhanie Scognamiglio: Paying participants is indeed a way to increase engagement. I remember once when someone said: "I'm here for the money." She made that clear from the outset. The amount could be based on what jurors receive, which is €80 a day. The same person told me: "I earn more coming here than at work, so that's why I'm here." Interestingly, at the end of the workshop, she approached me and said: "I'm glad I came because I enjoyed the experience. It was really interesting."

Marion Carrel: Moderation techniques that use personal narratives – based on or inspired by real life – can really help participants discuss and debate opposing stances and viewpoints. The idea is to work through conflict, but not necessarily to reach consensus, because conflict is part of democracy. If a participatory exercise results in democratic conflict, then it could arguably be considered a success because it has brought this conflict into the public sphere, where it can be debated. This is an interesting assessment criterion that should not be overlooked. Participation is not always about reaching consensus. The aim is to move from a situation where people experience violence, injustice and stigma, to one in which citizens have a space to openly and democratically debate and challenge other groups or institutions – a space to ask how and why these things can happen in democracy. Ultimately, democratic conflict can be a tool for mutual understanding and awareness, and not just for the people affected by these issues. For public officials, elected representatives, managers and professionals, participatory processes are a chance to hear from and talk to people with very different lived experiences, and to step back and look again at their own beliefs and practices.

How can participation inform decision-making?

Marion Carrel: Political scientists and sociologists have been grappling with the link between participation and decision-making for many decades. In France, we still have a long way to go on strengthening this link. In recent years, we have seen a growing appetite for more participation in the work of government and public policy-making at all levels. The creation of the CIPC exemplifies this trend. But the nature of the relationship between participation and decision-making is still unclear. There seems to be tendency to use participatory exercises as a way to gain public acceptance for controversial decisions, as we have seen recently with the Yellow Vests movement, the Great National Debate and the Citizens'Climate

Convention. The Great National Debate offered very little scope for deliberation, since there was no organised public exchange of arguments. The whole initiative revolved strongly around the President, who led and guided the debates. As for the Citizens'Climate Convention, there was real hope that the views expressed would translate into concrete decisions. The President even famously promised that the proposals would be put to parliament or to a referendum with "no filter". But this promise was not kept. In the end, the most ambitious proposals on social justice and reducing greenhouse gas emissions were shelved. Looking at how the process was organised and how the President's tone changed over time, it is clear that managing the link between deliberation and decision-making it a difficult task.

Locally, in all the exercises I have observed, little thought or structured effort has gone into the link between participatory processes and follow-up action. A kind of inertia seems to have set in. Even having decision-makers respond to the proposals or put them to a vote, such as by following a citizens'assembly with a referendum, is yet to become standard practice.

Typhanie Scognamiglio: To follow up on what Mrs Carrel said about building referendums into participatory processes, what happened in Ireland is an interesting case in point. The Citizens'Assembly process asked a simple "yes" or "no" question. By comparison, the Citizens'Climate Convention in France lacked this kind of closed question.

When citizens ask what purpose the exercise will serve, it is essential to give a clear answer. One way we can provide this answer is by measuring the impact of participatory processes at different levels. Two years ago, we began interviewing citizens who had taken part in these exercises, as well as project sponsors and representatives of public bodies, to find out whether the process had had a noticeable impact from their perspective. From this, we concluded that we needed to qualify what we meant by "impact" before we could measure it.

Do we measure impact solely in terms of the decision? Does it concern whether and how the decision changed? What about the stated intentions at the outset – did they change, and should this be considered an impact? Was the decision enriched by the exercise? I have heard criticism from some quarters that merely enriching the decision is not enough. Is the transformative effect of citizen participation on a government or public body an impact we should be measuring? If the exercise changed how a public policy was framed or how it approached a particular issue, should this be considered a sufficient impact or not? If so, how can it be measured? What about the effect of the exercise on the citizens who took part? Was it a transformative experience? Should we measure that too? The "impact" of a participatory process is a fluid concept.

We believe an impact assessment matrix would really help. The impact on the decision is one of the assessment criteria. But there are others, too. We are trying to devise an objective way of measuring the impact of a participatory process, taking all of its effects into account.

We have published the results of this work at participation-citoyenne.gouv.fr, although I should be clear that the site is by no means complete. We are trialling it right now, and we intend to expand it in the future.

The platform lists all voluntary consultation exercises initiated by central government. It includes relevant background information for each process such as its format and framing. For example, there is a section on the undertakings made by the project sponsor, and a section explaining the purpose of the consultation and how it works. In a separate section, citizens can see the results of different exercises. It is important to keep a record of these processes and their outcomes, since they could prove useful for future consultations on related topics. Last but not least, there is a section outlining what happened after each of these processes. This is the beating heart of the platform, because it tells citizens what impact the exercise had at the various levels I listed earlier. Was concrete action taken following the process? Did it lead to another consultation exercise? Did the entity that organised it change as a result? Have the results been published or otherwise shared? And so on.

To take one example, we believe that when we assess the impact of a participatory process, we should look at what the sponsor has done to publicise the views expressed by participants. Are the results locked away in an internal report or has the organiser made an effort to share them more widely? Publishing or distributing the results leads to greater impact because anyone outside the organising entity can read them – politicians, non-profits, local organisations and more.

Considering the exercise's impact on the decision raises other questions. Once time, effort and resources have been devoted to properly formulating the views of citizens, should they be

incorporated "as is" into the decision? In other words, should the participants'proposals be reproduced in the decision – or even in a piece of legislation – with no filter?

If so, then building the legitimacy of the results is crucial. On top of this, there are questions around the relationship between the results of a citizen participation exercise and the work performed or the results produced by experts, official bodies and government offices. It is important to bear in mind that decision-making is a collective endeavour. With any direct democracy exercise, you therefore have to consider how these various contributions complement and balance one another. The idea is not simply to replace one system with another.

Marion Carrel: We need to reflect on the widely held opinion that participation is some sort of duty or imperative. This kind of top-down imposition shifts the full burden of responsibility onto citizens, onto local people, who are held accountable for the success or failure of a participatory process. People are expected to turn up and share their opinions on all sorts of topics, but no one ever takes the time and effort to challenge the knowledge and expertise of public bodies, professionals or teachers. The risk, and you see this a lot in real life, is that by accepting participation as a duty, you fail to scrutinise how a university or other institution functions, to properly debate prevailing public-service or economic models, and so on. Democracy needs experts. But we also need our experts to learn from and be challenged by other experts. To paraphrase the famous words of American philosopher John Dewey, the expert shoemaker knows how to repair the shoe, but only the person wearing it knows where it pinches. In other words, everyone has expertise worth listening to. This is not just a question of method. If we want to avoid reducing participation to an exercise that shapes submissive citizens who know how to directly adopt a general-interest view, we need political will. The "participation-as-duty" model will do nothing to bridge the democratic divide. In fact, this divide will only get wider as misunderstandings and stereotypes become further entrenched. Having your expertise challenged is no walk in the park. It can be painful. As a professional, it is difficult to hear people tell you that things are not working for them. The answer implies departments and managers embracing participation and being open to organisational change. If you take the view that participation is not a duty imposed from on high, but is instead about empowering citizens and strengthening democracy then, logically, you have to accept that expertise in all its forms is worth listening to – in other words, that participatory processes can and should question institutions and established practice, improving them in a way that better reflects reality.

Where does citizen participation stand today?

Marion Carrel: To answer this question, we need to remember that participatory processes had their origins in civil society movements and non-profit organisations in the 1960s and 1970s. They emerged primarily from working-class neighbourhoods, where people demanded a greater say in the management of public facilities, public services and so on. This call for participation brought about change. But in the 1980s and 1990s we saw a role reversal whereby citizens were "invited" to participate by institutions – and this trend has accelerated in recent times. This institutionalisation process can be seen in the way that local authorities, as well as various levels of central government, incorporate participation into their working methods. Interestingly, this process is now gathering pace as we see participatory methods become embedded in the highest levels of government. But at the same time, citizens are also increasingly calling for their voices to be heard. It remains to be seen whether these two trends will converge. In many cases, people are demanding a greater say precisely because they are suspicious of institution-led participation. They prefer to self-organise, run experimental citizen-led processes and work together to develop new ways of living, especially on environmental issues.

The top-down, institution-led approach to participation carries two major risks. First, there is the risk of reducing participation to a technical and methodological exercise – of designing and implementing processes without considering the end goal. To be frank, now that participatory democracy is an industry in itself, there is nothing stopping an institution from commissioning a consultant to run a fake participatory process where the aim, as we discussed earlier, is to rubber-stamp decisions made behind closed doors. Second, there is a risk in public bodies having a monopoly over citizen participation. Where does the non-profit sector, and civil society more generally, fit into the picture? We should be wary of a situation whereby the people who make the decisions also hold all the power to design and implement participatory processes. In the end, institution-led participation should not dampen the public's enthusiasm for other, citizen-led forms of engagement.

What role does the Interministerial Centre for Citizen Participation play?

Typhanie Scognamiglio: At its June 2019 meeting, the Interministerial Committee on Government Transformation decided to create a new entity to drive citizen participation at central government level. How did we go about this? How did we design our service proposition and what were our priorities?

Our first priority was to improve how participatory processes were run, such as by ensuring more time was given to the framing stage, by clarifying the aims and objectives, by implementing best practices, and so on.

Our second priority was to build public-sector expertise in citizen participation. When you are engaging with citizens, there is no room for ad-libbing. You cannot just open a venue or deploy a tool and hope for the best. You have to take the whole matter seriously. It requires a lot of framing and methodology work. In the end, methodology is quite important.

It is important for officials to understand and appreciate the aims and objectives of citizen participation, and to recognise bias and know how to avoid it. Reviewing past participatory exercises also allows us to avoid repeating the same mistakes.

Learning how to use the tools and methods, and knowing how to design participatory processes, is equally important. A network of citizen participation officers was created in September 2021 to spearhead the work of building public-sector expertise. Every government department now has a contact person responsible for expanding citizen participation. These individuals can come to us for support, for example if they want to train officials in their department, need help selecting consultation topics, and so on.

We also make them aware of the need to uphold what we call the "duty of follow-up", which is the undertaking made by the project sponsor, and by the public body more generally, to report back to citizens on the impact of a consultation process. In practice, this means that the public body has to publish details of the action taken following the exercise, perhaps six months or a year down the line.

This approach allows us to build public-sector expertise in a more holistic manner, rather than project-by-project.

Our third priority has to do with transparency and the duty of follow-up I just mentioned. The goal here is to learn lessons from this impact-related work. Our role is less about preaching or imparting information and more about moving beyond the kind of binary thinking that considers a participatory exercise as either a complete failure or a resounding success.

We want to objectively measure an exercise's impact and learn lessons to drive continuous improvement. As well as using our platform, we also engage with citizens to find out what information they would need to form a view as to the impact of a consultation process.

What does the future hold for citizen participation?

Marion Carrel: Beneath this drive for greater participation lies a fundamental question for the future of democracy. This question has to do with competing time scales: leaders are in office for only a short period, need to get things done quickly and always have their eye on the next election, while issues like climate change play out over long periods and involve complex decisions. More generally, the future of participation lies in one of two scenarios. The first scenario, which we risk heading towards on the current trajectory, would see participatory exercises used as a way to dampen and control social movements, and as a tool for conflict resolution. What happened in the Great National Debate is a case in point: the National Public Debates Commission, an independent body tasked with ensuring the quality of public debate, was side-lined. The scenario taking shape right now is one of limited participation, and of efforts to manage or suppress social movements and self-organisation by citizens. Some of my colleagues describe this vision of participation as "monarchical".

The second, more ambitious scenario involves a democratic system in which participatory processes are designed and managed such that they make a genuine contribution to the general interest. Getting to that point means reforming every aspect of our democracy, starting with how we fund and encourage grassroots activities, especially in working-class neighbourhoods. I strongly support the idea of setting up a citizens'assembly to look again at our democratic institutions and to draw up a new Constitution. We need to think about how to inject new life into representative democracy, to consider

questions around proportional representation, the imperative mandate, electronic voting, and many other aspects besides. Our representative model should better reflect the diversity of the population. And it should be genuinely democratic.

Typhanie Scognamiglio: I think the push for participation is gathering momentum, and not just here in France. Three weeks ago, the Scottish Government published its Participation Framework, which aims to institutionalise citizen participation. The Parliament of the French Community in Brussels is also trialling the deliberative committee model. These are just two examples in a very long list. Things are changing at every level. In France, we have our first-ever minister for citizen participation. We also have the new CIPC. In 2021 alone, citizens were consulted on the future of Europe, on housing, on discrimination, on the future of the valleys decimated by Storm Alex in the Alpes-Maritimes *département*, and on other issues.

The Great National Debate and the Citizens' Climate Convention received extensive media coverage, but a lot of things happened in 2021. I absolutely see this trend as something positive. But I am not naive. We need to make participatory processes more robust. And we need to make sure the output of these exercises – the material they produce – is robust enough to be incorporated into public policies and decisions unfiltered. There are other challenges too, such as improving how we use the results of these processes, and the point we touched on earlier about bringing excluded sections of society into the fold. Because if we want these exercises to produce something meaningful, we have to make sure everyone has a chance to take part. We are at a pivotal point right now. There is still work to do on raising public awareness of participation and bringing people around to the idea that it is a positive. But the next step – the practical side of things – is just as important. This is not to contradict what I said earlier. It is important that we work on both fronts: acclimatising people to the idea of participation, fleshing out its aims and objectives, and so on, while also considering the nuts and bolts: how it happens in practice and how we scale it up. The stakes and ambitions are high, so how do we design participatory processes that live up to expectations? That is precisely the challenge facing us right now. For me, asking these questions and finding the answers is fascinating work.

Bercy's *Secrétariat général*: institutionalization and transformations (2000-2020)

Edoardo Ferlazzo, Marcel Guenoun and Jean Dezert

To mark the twentieth anniversary of the *Secrétariat général* of Bercy, the 9th issue of *APRP* looked at the ancient and contemporary history of the ministries' *Secrétariats généraux*. The paper translated here presents the contemporary history of the *Secrétariat général* of Bercy, from its institutionalization in 2000 in a context of deep ministerial crisis to its recent reorientation as a body for managing support functions and relaying State reform policies.

The issue also featured an interview between the Secretary-General of Bercy from 2019 to 2022, Marie-Anne Barbat-Layani, and political scientist Jean-Michel Eymeri-Douzans, shedding light on the role of the current ministerial SGs in the French and international administrative landscape and exposing the difficult place they occupy, frequently institutionalized and then defeated in French political and administrative history. The second paper compares French SGs with those of six other countries: Germany, Belgium, Denmark, Spain, Italy and the United Kingdom.

https://www.cairn.info/revue-action-publique-recherche-et-pratiques-2020-4.htm

Bercy's *Secrétariat général*: institutionalization and transformations (2000-2020)

Edoardo Ferlazzo, Marcel Guenoun and Jean Dezert

2000-2005: the return of the *Secrétariat général*

The post of Secretary-General in 2000, an exception in the recent history of the *Secrétariat général*

The modern SG came into being alongside the new century, and it was a difficult birth in the midst of the social conflict generated by the project to merge the Directorate-General of Public Accounts (DGCP) and the General Tax Directorate (DGI). The government dropped the reform and the minister, Christian Sautter, resigned. Thinking back on it, this conflict may seem paradoxical, since history has shown that this merger was both necessary and possible without major damage, and that it was in fact what the majority of the parties involved wanted: it was how the reform had been carried out that had been flawed, it was the social dialogue that had appeared to be (very) susceptible to improvement and, more generally, consultation, team coordination and the decision-making process at Bercy. An urgent overhaul of structures and operating methods was needed. The new Minister, Laurent Fabius, immediately distanced himself from administrative coordination tasks and refocused on strategic orientations. In May 2000 he created the position of "Secretary-General": a small team under the authority of a (very) close, unquestionably senior official, Bernard Pêcheur. He was tasked with improving the internal coordination at Bercy, advancing further and more systematically towards decompartmentalization, strengthening social dialogue and steering a process of government modernization.

The remit set out in Decree No. 2000-429 of May 23, 2000 was clear (see next page) and centered on three central principles:

- The SG is in charge of relaunching ministry modernization efforts and steering new projects with the support of the various directors.
- The SG is positioned as a steering and coordination entity for the ministry's horizontal functions: budgetary negotiations, interdepartmental projects, human resources, etc.
- However, the SG does not oversee support functions, the directorates responsible for them (administration, personnel, communication) being maintained.

The duties entrusted to the Secretary-General thus place him/her at an intermediate level in Bercy's "classic" hierarchy, between the ministerial and executive levels, as confirmed by this account:

> *"Bernard Pêcheur created the post of Secretary-General because he was convinced that there was a missing layer in the functioning of the ministry with which he was familiar as a young administrator in the Budget Department, he was in Fabius'private office at the Ministry of Industry, tasked with Budgetary Affairs. He put a layer in place that oversaw all matters of the ministry's general administration. A kind of governor... Call it what you like: governor, mayor of the palace, Minister of the Interior of the Ministry... And that was between the minister and the director."*

There are many ways of describing the role of this Secretary-General without a secretariat, but they all point to an intermediate position between the minister and the directorates:

> *"It was a sort of small head office tasked with orientation, animation and leadership of all the directorates, but it was not a management role at all! Not at all!"*

For some, "Bernard Pêcheur was a junior minister" to whom the minister entrusted the keys to the administrative management of the ministry:

> *"And along comes Laurent Fabius with someone who could have been his chief of staff, but who didn't want to be in charge of running a private office, who was a very high-ranking official, Bernard Pêcheur, a great specialist in social and organisational matters at the Conseil d'État. And*

Laurent Fabius, after the trauma of the strike and the resignation of a minister, decided to entrust the keys to the management of the ministry to one of his close friends."

The main points of Decree No. 2000-429 of May 23, 2000 establishing the powers of the Secretary-General of the Ministry of the Economy, Finance and Industry

Article 1 (repealed on 30 July 2006)

He/she is tasked with coordinating the administration and monitoring the Ministry's reform and modernization projects.

To this end:

He/she implements the Ministry's programming instruments.

He/she recommends to the Minister the distribution of resources among the departments.

He/she coordinates actions of interest to the Ministry's general administration in terms of personnel management, organization and operation of services.

He/she conducts, with the support of the Directors-General and Directors, projects of common interest.

He/she has at his/her disposal, where necessary, the Directorate of Personnel, Modernization and Administration, the Directorate of Public Relations and Communication and the Directorate of Legal Affairs.

Article 2 (repealed on 30 July 2006)

The Secretary-General chairs the committee of directors, which periodically brings together the ministry's directors general and directors.

He/she may chair, as a representative of the Minister, the ministerial joint technical committee.

As a result of this intermediate position of "coordinator of all directors": *"He is a super-director. He is the authority on personnel policy and resources. He is a sort of intermediary between the directors and the minister."*

This authority is not clearly reflected in the legislation:

> *"The question arose as to whether the provisions in the legislation provided that this new administrative authority would have authority over the directors of the central administration. We opted for the second solution, and I think it was the only one that was acceptable!* Although subtle clues run through it, *"the text does not provide for any authority over directors. But it was a first at the time for administrative structures: it nevertheless provided that the Secretary-General had the directorate of personnel and the directorate in charge of communication at his disposal. Having a department at one's disposal is a legal concept that until then was only found between ministers and secretaries of state or between ministers and deputy ministers!*

Upon taking up his new position, Pêcheur quickly ran up against some reluctance on the part of the management, whose methods of action and negotiation were significantly modified, as one director at the time put it: *"Naturally, all the directors at Bercy, where there is a fairly strong tradition of directional identity, view this with scepticism and concern"*. One account reflects the relationships resulting from the new situation:

> *"Bernard Pêcheur, in his office, was in fact receiving the various directors of Bercy, such as the Director General of Taxes, the Director of Public Accounting, the Director General of Customs, and so on. And during these meetings, which were very short and very instructive, the amount of the appropriations and the number of staff were determined […] The directors presented their arguments… Pêcheur listened to them and then took the floor, and he said to them, "Well, that's my decision, and that's that. […] A director-general took the floor again afterwards, and when he had finished speaking, Bernard Pêcheur looked at him very sternly, saying: 'When the Secretary-General has spoken, the discussion is over.'"*

Attempts by the directorates to negotiate were short-lived. The authority of the Secretary-General, backed by the confidence of the minister and a large delegation, was particularly asserted through the budgetary decisions he had to make, as Bernard Pêcheur confirmed: *"The last resort of the Secretary-General's authority was the principle*

of responsibility: receiving his powers from the minister and reporting only to him, the Secretary-General had to be – and indeed was – the final level of decision-making, without any interface with the private office, in the areas entrusted to him, particularly with regard to the budget." The negotiating margins of the directors were cut back, and the directorates yielded:

> *"As you can imagine, the directors of Bercy, the directors of Taxes, Customs, etc., were not used to being treated like that at all! They were used to negotiating their budget, in the minister's office, they didn't take it very well at first, and then it was understood quite quickly. There were one or two who tried to return to the minister's office and were turned away. They understood that that's how it worked. And it worked very well!"*

The ascendancy gained over the directorates also took the form of symbolic choices that established Pêcheur's position within the hierarchy of the ministry, resolutely on the side of the administration, but at the top:

> *"Bernard Pêcheur arrives and says: 'the closest office to the private office is the one occupied by the director of the Treasury' […] He takes the office of the director of the Treasury, which is moved back a few steps in the corridor. […] The offices at Bercy had a standard. A director's office measured 12 trames, a head of department was given 10, a deputy director 8, and an office manager 4. Well, Pêcheur says: 'Give me an office with 13 trames!'"*

This is a symbol that everyone understands. As the interested party said: *"It's better than a decree of attribution."*

Having now acquired legitimacy, the Secretary-General rapidly gained in credibility in the management of several administrative projects, winning the support of the directors, on whom he did not hesitate to call.

Thus, vested with the function of coordinating modernization efforts, he set himself the aim of facilitating service to users, based on an interdepartmental approach; he would oversee the trial run of a single tax point of contact that would bring together the eight Ministry of Economy and Finance's (MINEFI) networks, create the Institute for Public Management and Economic Development (IGPDE), which provides in-service training for the ministry's civil servants, and take part in several schemes to bring different government departments closer together: institutionalization of the Directorate General for Enterprise, creation of Tax Service Call Centers, merger between tax offices and tax collection offices, etc. The SG also played a leading role in the shift towards "e-administration" (in addition to the massive Copernicus program, the Helios project, which involves the local public sector, the creation of the Ministry's Internet portal, etc.). He followed up each of these projects and provided the necessary encouragement for their progress.

In addition, together with the Personnel, Modernization and Administration Directorate (DPMA), the SG ensured the proper application of the 35-hour working week reform within the Ministry, as indicated in these remarks concerning the HR missions devolved onto the SG:

> *"With the DPMA, a sort of coordination was ensured, and Bernard Pêcheur regularly brought the directors together to ensure coordination and focus on very specific actions. In particular, at the time, it was the introduction of the 35-hour working week; it was carried out by the directorates, and we coordinated."*

The nature of the SG's intervention differs from project to project. It is sometimes the initiator and driving force behind major transformations, as in the case with the Copernicus program, and sometimes a mediator between departments with potentially divergent interests, as in the case of experiments with a single partner.

But it is also in the way it operates, its management approach, that the SG innovates and succeeds in mobilizing the directorates: it has established a collegial mode of coordination for steering major projects, defining itself as a 'group leader'responsible for improving the circulation of information, the fluidity of debate and reporting[1]. Although the Directors Committee was set up in the 1990s, it is now chaired by the SG. In this sense, it organizes several cross-directorate consultative bodies, including:

- A monthly meeting of the Directors Committee, where projects of common interest are discussed,
- The Network Directors'Committee, which brings together the eight Directors-General heading up the then decentralized service directorates,
- Steering committees for each major modernization project.

1 Pêcheur (2006), « Le renouveau des secrétaires généraux de ministère », *Les Cahiers de la fonction publique,* pp. 7–10.

Thus, much more akin to a steering directorate than a management directorate, the SG became an epitome of modernity and ministerial coordination. At that point, a team formed around a Secretary-General was perceived as a means of managing the ministry's cross-cutting nature. A two-person effort was established with the DPMA, which took charge of the operational dimensions of this cross-functionality. Whether strategic or operational, as Marie-Laurence Pitois-Pujade points out: "*The central point of convergence is to take a process-based approach to subjects to high- light any blind spots that are not dealt with by the directorates.*"

Towards a widespread use of secretaries general in all ministries (2002-2005)

In 2002, Philippe Parini replaced Bernard Pêcheur as Secretary-General. The same strategic dimension prevailed within a team that was still as tightly knit as ever, although slightly larger – some ten staff members. Philippe Parini remembers:

> *"I retained the Pêcheur model, but without the same close relationship with Francis Mer. But I did have it, in actual fact, because, since he knew nothing about the ministry, he thought that his Secretary-General would decipher things for him, including with respect to the directors. […] I didn't have the authority that a Bernard Pêcheur could have, but I maintained collegiality, I brought the directors together regularly. […] From the point of view of positioning and means, Pêcheur and Parini are the same system.*"

The aim was to consolidate the achievements of the previous period:

> *"What I wanted was to drive the pilings into the ground. So I institutionalized the meeting of all the directors, they attended. I set up procedures, for example for budgeting, giving them a contact person. We went to their offices, then afterwards we met in our offices. There was a mini budget meeting. The same was true for personnel matters… […] I "proceduralized" it all somewhat. I've always been convinced that, in the administration, when something doesn't exist spontaneously and naturally, it has to be set up with procedures. On the other hand, it may not always be worth keeping the same procedures, you see what I mean… […] Perhaps that's where we succeeded the most… The anchoring, the pilings, the permanent construction…".*

It was not so much the positioning of the SG within the Ministry nor the nature of the duties with which it was tasked, but rather the scope of those duties that evolved, very gradually, almost imperceptibly until 2005, and much more markedly thereafter.

As part of the Constitutional Bylaw on Budget Acts (LOLF) reform, which was passed in 2001, the SG was allocated two programs that did not fall within the management of the Ministry's support functions. These programs were a reflection of the SG's action as a coordinating and mediating body between the various stakeholders at Bercy. They involved joint missions involving several directorates with potentially divergent interests.

The first program was the direct result of the work to bring the DGCP and the DGI closer together during the period 2001-2007, in anticipation of the merger that took place in 2008. When the LOLF actually came into force in 2006, program 156, entitled "Tax and financial management tasks performed on behalf of central government", was entrusted to the SG in accordance with a conciliation rationale:

> *"The first Program 156, created in 2006, encompassed the entire DGI, the entire DGCP – this is what eventually became the 2008 DGI/DGCP merger – by adding the tax responsibilities of French Customs. And as a result, Jean Bassères, who became SG in 2005, took over responsibility for this Program, because it integrated two major directorates that had not yet been merged. It didn't seem possible to give the first opportunity to appoint one or the other of the directors as head of the Program. […] Rather than choosing, it was decided that it would be the Secretary-General as a third party, both neutral and above the directors.*"

As Philippe Parini explains, during his tenure as SG, at a time when the two tax departments at Bercy had put the idea of a merger back on the table, the SG remained at arms'length, simply facilitating social dialogue and communication of the project, notably with the unions:

> *"Things had been so complicated. The situation was so controversial that we let the two directors concerned get on with it. […] They were the ones who started to rebuild bridges, but they were really like the bridges over the Rhine in 1945, it was like wartime… But in the end, they were the ones who calmed things down, and we started talking to each other again, and we let them run their two directorates. I thought it would be a mistake to get involved, and what's more, it would even have been misunderstood by the staff. […] My Secrétariat général was not against the directorates.*"

In the same vein, the SG took over responsibility for Program 199, entitled "Regulation and security of trade in goods and services", which brought together the Directorate General of Customs and Excise (DGDDI) and the Directorate General for Competition Policy, Consumer Affairs and Fraud Control (DGCCRF).

At the time, the SG's remit was still focused on a steering and supervisory role: for this reason, it was not given responsibility for Program 218 (which concerns the management of central government support functions); this role fell to the Personnel and Work Environment Adaptation Directorate (DPAEP) and remained there until 2010, when it was absorbed into the SG.

In 2004, the SG also took part in the merger between the Directorate for Foreign Economic Relations (DREE) and the Directorate for Forecasting and Economic Analysis (DPAE):

> *"There was the Prime Minister who said: 'You have to regroup the central structures somewhat, downsize your directorates, etc.'". And we had the DREE, a very large directorate, with many staff, since it had offices in every country in the world. It was then challenged because the chambers of commerce had their own offices [...] The Government Audit Office, the press, etc., said: 'But how is it that France has such a large administration with such a large deficit?' [...] A certain number of economic ministers wondered what could be done; the DREE itself wanted to reform itself. So we spoke to the directors concerned, notably the Director of the Treasury, to get the DREE back on the condition that the network would be slimmed down. That it would be regionalized, to have one representative per major region of the world rather than per country".*

In addition, the SG developed the *"Bercy en mouvement"* (Bercy on the move) and *"Bercy ensemble"* (Bercy together) programs, in a bid to emphasize the fact that the Ministry was moving away from the internal strife of the 1990s:

> *"The idea was to get moving. There was a Secrétariat général, and then there was this whole series of reforms. We were moving forward. The relations between the DGI and the CP had been resolved, the two directorates were taking care of it, and so on. Even if it demonstrated the response to a political order, it's always important to have an acronym [...] Bercy on the move was a way of getting all the directorates on board the train and telling them: "Listen, internally, you still have to think about it a little bit! You're not going to stay on the platform! And in any case, we'll have a collective response!*

As soon as Francis Mer took over as minister in 2002, he set about accelerating the modernization of the ministry. More attentive to the management of the ministry than his predecessor, Mer monitored the reforms very closely, in direct contact with the directors. The SG was therefore more involved in the reporting function, while not exercising as much arbitration authority as in the preceding period:

> *"Parini, it was not in his personality, he knew the Ministry too well to maintain what Pêcheur was doing, which was akin to a misdemeanour: arbitrations in his office, etc. [...] On the other hand, Francis Mer, unlike Fabius, was extremely interested in how the ministry was managed, as a former factory manager, then boss of a large private company with objectives, etc. He was also very interested in the management of the ministry. And, unlike Fabius, who never met with the directors on these matters, Francis Mer received them and gave them a monthly update on the progress of the modernization projects, which had been defined with Parini and on which Parini regularly reported to the minister, whom he saw every week. And then each director was asked to explain to the Minister why such and such a subject wasn't moving forward, and so on."*

Nevertheless, the SG was at the core of Bercy's major reforms and even inspired other ministries. It seemed desirable to have a solid intermediary to ensure the efficiency of the budgetary management of the directorates, in compliance with the objectives of the LOLF.

The circular of June 25, 2003 on ministerial reform strategies, which provided for a systematic re-examination of their duties and structures, set up a working group chaired by Francis Mer. Its conclusions were included in the circular of June 2, 2004, which stipulated that, "in each ministry whose size and administrative management responsibilities justify it, a 'Secretary-General'will be appointed". It was also established that the Secretary-General would report directly to the Minister and would have at least two responsibilities: implementation of the Ministry's reform strategy and management of senior and executive staff. As part of this process, the posts of Secretaries General were created in the Ministries of the Interior (January 29, 2004), Social Affairs (February 7, 2005), Agriculture (April 25, 2005), Public Works (May 16, 2005) and Justice (August 24, 2005), in addition to those of the Ministries for

the Economy and Finance, Foreign Affairs and Defence. The SG as it was developed within the economic and finance ministries therefore served as a model, a benchmark. This legitimization further bolstered the position of Bercy's SG:

> *"As a result, in all the interministerial meetings, the Secretary-General spoke for the entire ministry and so there too, the directors could no longer circumvent him or her, they were obliged to go through the SG to exist at the interministerial level and put forward their requests, their reforms… The widespread introduction of the Secretary-General undoubtedly strengthened the role of the Bercy SG."*

Upon his arrival in 2005, Jean Bassères tasked the Inspectorate General of Finance (IGF) with auditing the Personnel, Modernization and Administration Directorate (DPMA). The report highlighted both a loss of momentum and a cumbersome bureaucracy within this directorate:

> *"What is also certain is that the DPAEP in the 2000s had not only lost some of its prestige with the creation of the SG under Pêcheur and then Parini, etc., but had also become a directorate that was running a bit on empty with an enormous staff. A bureaucratic culture that, as the report indicated, no longer had enough momentum to face the challenges of the time."*

The IGF therefore proposed bringing the DPMA and DIRCOM into the *Secrétariat général*. Initially, Jean Bassères suggested setting up four departments: human resources, modernization, budgetary and property matters, and information systems. This was a first step towards refocusing the SG's scope of action on management functions, which gradually took precedence over the initial steering activities. The relaunch of the State's modernization drive was a key factor in this change. New interministerial structures, such as the Directorate General for State Modernization (DGME), created by decree on December 30, 2005, or the General Secretariat for Administration to the Prime Minister, established by decree on April 21, 2006, were in fact in demand for effective ministerial intermediaries to manage the "administration of administrations": *"Increasingly, the SGs became the contact for the entities involved in government modernization."*

Jean Bassères included the development of the SG as part of this general movement. In this sense, the *Secrétariats généraux* progressively moved closer to the model of a *Secrétariat général* established at the Ministry of Defence, in charge of the administrative pole of the Ministry, notably within the Ministries of Education and the Interior. The end of the 2000s and the beginning of the 2010s were a time of adjustments aimed at transforming the SG into a "resource super-director"[2], capable of verticalizing its efforts by acquiring a stronger, more powerful structure, while maintaining a certain amount of leadership in its horizontal functions of coordinating major departmental projects.

From the Secretary-General to the *Secrétariat général*: integrating the Ministry's management functions (2005/2020)

Progress towards a genuine *Secrétariat général* (2005-2010)

The Bassères project was established by Decree No. 2006-947 of 28 July 2006: it transferred a significant part of the duties of the personnel directorate to the SG. It was the birth certificate of a true *Secrétariat général*: 80 employees, many of whom came from the DPMA. The post of Senior Management Delegate was created. Two departments with national scope were also attached to the SG: the Institute for Public Management and Economic Development and the Central Purchasing Agency, the precursor to the future Public Procurement Department. Finally, the SG also housed an economic intelligence department, separate from the Senior Defence and Security Official. The 2006 reform thus reshaped the scope of the SG, without, however, making it responsible for all administrative management tasks: for the time being, the management of central services (DPAEP) and the ministry's communication (Sircom) remain the responsibility of structures outside the SG.

When the General Review of Public Policies (RGPP) began in 2007, the SG became a key player in monitoring this reform:

> *"It was the time of the RGPP, with an extensive centralization of the government reform that took place at the Élysée, and all the SGs reported*

2 Pêcheur (2006), « Le renouveau des secrétaires généraux de ministère », *Les Cahiers de la fonction publique*, p. 10.

directly [...] to Claude Guéant. For each SG, it was clear that the SG was responsible for implementing the RGPP in their ministry. It was an assumed choice. The Élysée was very much aware that there were strong and weak ministries with SGs, but the idea was: "We have the SGs, we are going to strengthen them, make them strong where they are not, by going through them. These were subjects where we had a supra-directional role, and the directorates would come and explain the status of the projects they had been asked to implement."

The SG then had to juggle between politicians who wanted to make progress on the modernization efforts underway and administrative directors who were sometimes difficult to rally.

"These tasks were not always easy to carry out with the directorates. And besides, the directorates a little too often – pardon my familiar way of putting it – lumped us a little too readily in with the DGME, if you see what I mean!

The role of steering ministerial coordination remained crucial in certain large-scale projects, such as the merger of 12 January 2009 reshaping the DGE or support for the directorates involved in the reform of the government's regional administration.

In the second half of the 2000s, the combination of steering and management tasks was confusing to observers: the SG's precise position within the ministry was questioned with varying degrees of intensity. The initial sequence first and foremost, but dependent on the relationship between the SG and the minister, the SG kept control over actions that were all-encompassing and potentially burdensome for the directorates (budget programs, performance contracts with network directorates, harmonization of compensation schemes between directorates, modernization programs, mediation role in the context of the strike at Customs in 2007), while gradually absorbing more and more day-to-day management functions.

The purpose of the 2010 reform was to clarify the SG's role; the choices made at that time defined a scope that more or less lasted until 2020.

A new model and rollercoaster changes (2010-2017)

Following the arrival of Dominique Lamiot as Secretary-General in 2008, a new plan was drawn up regarding the future of the SG, building on the developments of the previous years. Decree no. 2010-444 of 30 April 2010 relating to the powers of the Secretary-General of the economic and finance ministries expedited the integration of support functions within the SG. Acting on the decision made in early 2010 by the ministers to bring both the DPAEP and Sircom departments under the authority of a greatly expanded *Secrétariat général*, the new post holder set himself the goal of achieving a balance, still very volatile at the time, between steering and management, and harmonizing the two practices within a single structure, as illustrated by the HR function:

"The Ministry of Finance was undoubtedly one of the few ministries where you couldn't find anyone whose door read "Director of Human Resources". An important part of the ministry's activities were led at the level of the central government Personnel Directorate. The entire "Social Action" component was handled by the DPMA on behalf of the entire ministry, which meant that the DPMA was in a somewhat hybrid situation of managing both central administration staff and social action, but retained a role in social action that was ministerial this together in a single unit that would be a large joint HR directorate for the entire ministry, which would not of course replace the HR departments of the various directorates, but would constitute a center of expertise with both steering and management skills in all aspects of HR policy and policies."

This decree had four main objectives: to clarify responsibilities, in particular between the SG and the DPAEP; to boost the effectiveness of the steering of ministerial policies; to implement a rationalization strategy regarding support functions, in particular at a time when interministerial action was being stepped up; and to improve the quality of the service provided. The SG took over Program 218 "Management and oversight of economic and financial policies", which covers certain support functions of the central administration and the key directorates without networks. Finally, following a decree on budgetary and accounting management in 2012, the SGs were appointed to be responsible for the ministerial financial function (RFFIM), in charge of bringing together the programs for which the ministry's directorates are responsible.

This marked the emergence and institutionalization of a "large format" SG. It brought together a total of 3,000 employees, including 2,500 from the former DPAEP, 200 from IGPDE, 120 from Sircom, 70 from SHFDS and about a hundred from the 2006 SG. The official organization underscores the SG's managerial restructuring, since the

management functions involve most of the staff, i.e. 2,800 agents (including 800 at the decentralized level). For the most part, this format has remained essentially unchanged to this day.

> *"This merely confirmed the changes that had already taken place, but it was a clear sign of the change from what an administrative mission really was, based around a person in charge of a particular assignment, with an extremely lean administration that didn't manage any files, to a classic 'administering' body in which 'who does what' was very precisely defined, etc. Something much weightier."*

Against this background, management tasks took precedence to some extent over strategic steering tasks:

> *"When you weigh down a structure with support functions, you realize that they take precedence over strategic thinking. Why is this? Because the support and logistics functions are always more urgent. It's foolish, but it's human. It's always more urgent than long-term or more political thinking..."*

In this sense, an unwieldy bureaucracy hinders a smooth flow of information between offices that appear to be more compartmentalized than in the days of the DPMA:

> *"We increased the number of offices and compartmentalized a great deal, and the flow of information was, in my opinion, greatly affected, and even today information flow is still an issue within the SG."*

Nevertheless, the SG remains actively involved in a number of projects that have grown in importance over the past decade, in particular in relation to issues of pooling and service quality.

Following a cyberattack on the Ministry's networks in 2011, the SG was mobilized to strengthen the information systems security policy. Then, starting in autumn 2013, the SG was tasked by the minister to implement a ministerial plan to "pool support functions". This plan, which comprised a little over thirty measures drawn from an audit by the IGF, initiated certain major innovations, such as the strategic committee on information systems and the lowering of the intervention threshold for SG's inter-regional property offices. However, it quickly failed to make this cross-cutting dimension a long-term reality, having clearly expressed a desire to review the boundaries involved, which would have a detrimental effect on the level of commitment of the bodies concerned. This relative failure can be summarized as follows:

> *"In 2013, the private offices [...] asked Dominique Lamiot to implement pooling of support functions, which was clearly launched with a budgetary entry point. Dominique Lamiot was in fact somewhat circumspect about the head-on nature of the method, even with the solid work of the IGF to support it. The report caused a mini-outcry as soon as it was presented to the directors in the summer of 2013. [...] The feeling was 'ah yes, that's really interesting, we completely agree, we must pool support functions, moreover we ourselves have ideas, it's very good'. However, Mr. Minister, we are enclosing the comments on the report where it was listed: 'This we can do, this we can't do'. [...] Since the private offices insisted, it flourished, that is to say that among the seventy proposals, they selected thirty-nine which were made official with a letter from the minister entrusting the new SG, Laurent de Jekhowsky, to oversee the implementation by and with the directorates. It gradually disappeared from view in two or three years. [...] As a result, the method has produced distrust in relation to the pooling of support functions..."*

Some of the initiatives undertaken remain unfinished and clash with the variety of roles now covered by the SG: service provider for the directorates, in charge of ministerial pooling, etc. The adjective "vague" comes up again and again in the memories of the participants at the time.

Moreover, the report on the civil service, drafted by Bernard Pêcheur and published on October 29, 2013, notes that the *Secrétariats généraux*'s room for manoeuvre should be better defined, with the aim of strengthening them. The *Secrétariat général* is the appropriate instrument to ensure administrative stability. Consequently, it is appropriate to establish "administrative ministerial perimeters", defined as all those departments whose management is coordinated by a single Secretary-General, in particular with a view to strengthening the steering of human resources policies. Why not have the Secretary-General chair the ministerial technical committee? The report also proposes transforming the *Secrétariats généraux* into responsibility and management centers, which would imply that the authority to manage staff be delegated to them by the minister. The *Secrétariats généraux* would be the direct reporting structures for the services for which they would be responsible. Lastly, the report aims to make the SGs responsible for statutory and budgetary coordination between the Ministry's departments and thus to assume, with the support of the human resources departments or resource managers, responsibility for the management of certain bodies, over and above that of a few cross-cutting missions.

Less than a year after the Pêcheur Report, the Government Audit Office's summary judgment of 13 October 2014 on secretaries general and ministerial secretaries general expressed concern that a number of shortcomings remained, which hampered the effectiveness of the SG's role as coordinator. Their brief terms of office, less than three years in most ministries, was called into question. This short time-frame makes it impossible "to mitigate the disadvantages for the functioning of the administration of frequent shifts in ministerial scopes and the ongoing discrepancy between, on the one hand, the governmental organization and, on the other hand, the administrative organization which is the consequence of this"[3]. It also blocks the conduct of large-scale ministerial and inter-ministerial projects. Without going so far as to propose that a minimum period of office be determined by regulation, the Office recommended that a multi-year letter of engagement accompany the Secretary-General's entry into office, in order to consolidate the Secretary-General's work over time. Such a letter would give the SG responsibility for carrying out certain modernization and reform projects and would strengthen his or her legitimacy. It would thus make it possible to respond to the Court's observation of "persistent difficulties in the coordination of eighteen different central administration directorates, including a very large network directorate-general". Moreover, the Court regretted the relatively weak capacity of certain *Secrétariats généraux*, including that of the economic and finance ministries, to fulfil their duty to manage senior executives and senior managers. It notes that "there are still a few ministries (Interior, Justice, Economy and Finance) – those in which the function of Secretary-General has the greatest difficulty in establishing itself – where significant progress remains to be made in terms of the cross-cutting nature of the management of senior executives". In this sense, it appears that the coordination means available to the *Secrétariat général* remain very closely dependent on the link between ministerial private offices and directorates. The original model, based on the confidence of the minister and focused on cross-cutting projects, has been adopted by the directorates. The model based on resource management has more difficulty in influencing directorates. For certain issues, notably statutory and compensation matters, and although the SG is the ministry's one-stop shop, its involvement in the choices made by the directorates remains complicated (Pochard, 2019):

> *"Within Bercy, there are nevertheless fairly significant imbalances between administrations depending on one's status. […] When it comes to HR issues, and questions about bonuses and status, it is still the DB and the DGAFP who weigh in, so… that's that! The SG is an intermediary, rather than a driving force in this field."*

However, these comments deserve to be qualified, particularly with regard to HR:

> *"There are quite a few common elements, especially when it comes to statutory matters. If you look at all the statuses of category A, B and C staff in Bercy's directorates, you can see that the broad outlines are quite consistent from one status to another, from one directorate to another […] So the professions are not the same, the career paths are not completely the same, but there are some features of consistency which are not negligible. Then, I think we have to keep it simple. I think that it would be completely pointless for the Secretary-General to want to replace the directorates in the day-to-day management of their staff. The directorates exist and we must also guarantee a management capacity and autonomy that is consistent with the exercise of their professions and their specificities. On the other hand, steering, general organization and overall coherence are jobs for the Secretary-General!"*

Clearly, the SG has to deal with directorates that are often reluctant to let it interfere in their management. It is gradually becoming apparent that its credibility in relation to the other directorates and the minister's private office resides largely in its ability to contribute its expertise:

> *"One of the reasons behind the changes in the Secrétariat général is precisely that, since the Secretary-General does not have this form of functional authority over the other directors and all the directorates, he or she has to rely much more on a capacity for independent expertise; therefore, he or she has to draw on intellectual capital and experience, hence the need to have competent departments working with him or her. The SG also positions itself in a different context which is more that of a service provider, both for management and for private offices. In other words, private offices and ministers are often quite happy to have some form of internal counter-expertise that enables them to better*

3 Cour des Comptes (2014), *Référé sur les secrétaires généraux et secrétariats généraux des ministères*, p. 3.

judge or appreciate the merits of what this or that director or directorate tells them."

Moreover, the SG continues to act as a "peacemaker" with respect to social relations within the directorates, particularly in cases where dialogue seems to be blocked, and external intervention is needed for the purpose of identifying the means of initiating a new approach:

"What you have to bear in mind is that the SGs [...] have also played a role, which is nowhere documented, in helping directorates with somewhat weak leadership. [...] When there is a director who is lagging a bit behind, who is a bit weak, where social dialogue has broken down... Well, the SG, at the more or less implicit request of the private offices, provides assistance... The request can also come from the trade union organizations, which basically bypass the directors to obtain something different at SG level."

The SG therefore retains its role as mediator within Bercy, including when reorganising existing departments or creating new ones, such as when setting up the Directorate General for Enterprise (DGE):

"Christine Lagarde's private office specifically asked the SG at the time to oversee the creation of the DGE – its re-creation, in fact, because an initial DGE had existed for several years but on a more limited scale. It was also a General Public Policy Review (RGPP) initiative, because three pre-existing directorates were being merged: one dealt with companies, another with crafts and the third with tourism. It was Dominique Lamiot, who steered the merger at the level of social dialogue, but also a little of the setting up of the initial organization and organization chart."

This same mediation role continued with the arrival of Laurent de Jekhowski as head of the Secrétariat général in 2013:

"Social dialogue is an essential role for the SG. ...] The idea is that there is a directorate-level social dialogue, but that there must also be ministerial social dialogue on cross-cutting subjects. It was indeed the role of the Secrétariat général to steer it. [...] It was important to rally all the directors of the ministry together, knowing that a poorly managed conflict in one ministerial directorate could obviously have knock-on effects on other directorates, particularly the large network directorates. [...] In fact, I remember having had to manage and intervene directly in directorate-level conflicts when the role of the SG was not, in principle, that of a director. The role of the SG is to steer ministerial dialogue with the authorities and to let each director conduct his own internal dialogue. So I had to intervene twice at the request of the ministers to prevent social conflicts from getting out of hand, first at Customs and then at the CCRF."

Relationships with other ministry stakeholders are thus more a matter of dialogue than authority and conflict:

"For me, all this could only work with good understanding. When you are in this coordinating role provided for by the decree that outlines the functions of the Secretary-General drawn up by Pêcheur, you can only tell people what to do if they are willing to work with you. You have no power to oppose them, and I always told my colleagues: [...] 'The directorates will only agree to work and collaborate with you if you are useful to them! What can you do for them? What you can bring to the table is to show them that you have defended their position well at interministerial level, you have improved it, you have helped them, etc. If you are of no use to them, on the contrary, you are putting a spanner in the works, they will refuse to work with you.'"

The interest that private offices may find in the SG's intervention is particularly strong in a period marked by the strong growth of interministerial cooperation. In 2012, the General Secretariat for Government Modernization (SGMAP), under the authority of the Prime Minister, relaunched the large-scale project to develop interministerial policies for the support functions.

The SG was thus empowered in its role as an interface between the executive and ministerial spheres, even if this didn't preclude direct relations between the SGMAP and the directorates on certain specific reforms. This is clearly articulated by an SGMAP staff member:

"We had regular meetings [...] just between the SGMAP and the SG, and we took stock of the ministerial transformation plans, the modernization plans. How far along are you? Do you need the SGMAP? The SGs were very much strengthened in their role as coordinators! [...] Ministry directorates continued to be powerful. So our discussion partners were the SGs, but when the SGMAP's resources come into play, of course, our points of contact were the directorates themselves."

This new role is enshrined in the decree of July 24, 2014 on the Secretary-Generals of the ministries, who, in addition to coordinating services and ensuring ministerial modernization, were also

made responsible for ensuring that the ministry is properly integrated into interministerial work. Under the aegis of the government's Secretary-General, cooperation and exchanges between the secretaries-general of the different ministries are thus affirmed, based on frequent meetings, as Laurent de Jekhowski can attest:

> *"This cooperation between SGs under the aegis of the SGG was gradually established [...] It was a time when the paths of all the ministry SGs were somewhat similar to those of Bercy, even if the other SGs were more recently created. At the same time, they had undoubtedly moved faster than we had at Bercy, as is always the case when you are a forerunner. It can take longer when you are the first than when the others follow. [...] So we all had the problem of internal positioning in relation to management and the private office. And then we all had many opportunities to discuss the major shared concerns around modernization."*

At the end of 2016, the DGAFP placed increasing emphasis on departmental HR policies and drew on the SGs to build a new HR strategy and a ministerial management plan. That same year, the Public Procurement Directorate and the Government Property Directorate became more oriented towards the SGs. The Decree of January 26, 2015 also assigned to the SG the function of ministerial procurement manager (RMA), which had previously been performed within the Public Procurement Department (SAE). Created in the autumn of 2015, the Interministerial Directorate for Digital Technology and the Government Information and Communication System (DINSIC) drew on the ministries'SGs to bolster interministerial and ministerial governance regarding information systems. At the same time, cooperation on the subject of cybersecurity between the National Information System Security Agency (ANSSI), the Government Financial Information Systems Agency (AIFE) and the Interministerial HR Information Services Center (CISIRH) and the SGs was stepped up with a view to developing the ministries'digital skills. The SG clearly established itself as the interministerial relay within the directorates:

> *"We were the linchpin in responding to interdepartmental orders and therefore dependent both on the orders we received and on what the directorates themselves did. We were more assemblers of things that were done in the directorates [...] So we at SG were assemblers and conveyor belts.""But as time went by, the situation worsened. The more proposals there are, the more difficult it is to synthesize them. The directorates put all the measures in bulk and it became highly technical. So we increasingly focused on streamlining because we understood that, when we propose large-scale modernization projects, the SG is not at all considered to have any legitimacy."*

The period from 2005 to 2017 was therefore marked by two major developments: the creation of a "large" SG through the absorption of the DPAEP and the rise of an interministerial space that renews, in a less personalized framework than at the outset, the SG's position as an intermediary between management and private offices. This phase was a moment of transition between two models, from a Secretary-General/arbitrator to a Secretary-General/coordinator and manager.

The late 2010s: the beginnings of a new SG?

From 2017 onwards, several developments benefitted the SG and strengthened its influence within the Ministry. This increased stability is therefore an opportune moment to reflect more calmly on the organization's necessary transformations.

Scaled-down private offices

The place of the ministerial private offices is a well-worn topic of debate in political and administrative life. As of 2017 they were downscaled, modifying the relations between the private offices/SG/directorates triumvirate. The 2018 Budget Act no. 2017-1837 of December 30, 2017 stipulated a 25% reduction in the total number of members in each private office. A minister can now have only ten advisers, a minister delegate, eight, and a secretary of state, five.[4] This reduction led to the elimination of the post of social adviser in Bercy's private office, resulting in a *de facto* increase in the influence of the *Secrétariat général*, who

4 In 2019, this rule was nevertheless relaxed to include a new adviser specialized in monitoring and implementing government reform in each ministerial private office. The arrival of J. Castex at Matignon in July 2020 was a turning point, allowing ministers to expand their private offices.

henceforth was the only one to have this role[5]. If the SG becomes the ministerial expertise on social issues, relations between directorates and private offices on the subject are partly short-circuited and the SG becomes the directorates'primary point of contact on the subject.

This determination to streamline exchanges between private offices and directorates, thanks to the SGs, continued with the Circular of June 5, 2019 on the reform of working methods. Several areas of reform emerged and bolstered the SG's role. On the one hand, the circular urges administrations to "pay particular attention to dealing with the many cases of overlap that still exist, particularly between the support functions of directorates and the ministries' *Secrétariats généraux*, between the various 'business'directorates within the same ministry or at several ministries (the case of many interministerial policies that need to be rationalized), between directorates and operators". The objectives pursued were, in particular, the result of discussions on the restructuring of organizational charts, a reduction in the number of hierarchical levels and a reduction in redundant activities in order to facilitate the creation of project teams. In addition, the circular sought to improve the functioning of interministerial work by calling for closer collaboration between directorates and ministerial private offices, as well as more fluid cooperation between administrations involved in the same project. It emerges from this that the SG's role as mediator both within Bercy and in relation to other ministries is even more justified, all the more so as the success of this cooperation is a criterion for assessing the performance of directors.

The approaches taken in terms of government reform therefore created a particularly favourable context for the SG's role to take root in the cooperative spirit between private offices and directorates, between Bercy directorates, and in the interministerial framework:

> *"Since 2017, the SG's role has been better accepted also because the private office has entrusted it with ministerial coordination tasks that the private office did not necessarily assign to it previously. And therefore, as a consequence, it seems to me, its legitimacy is growing!*

One of the most emblematic examples of this new situation is without doubt the establishment of the Innovation task force within the Synthesis, Coordination, and Innovation (SCI) Delegation beginning in 2015. It is responsible for creating, testing and promoting ministerial actions aimed at disseminating a culture of innovation and developing innovative services and working methods. It is thus a resource that the directorates can decide to use to assist them in innovative projects. This principle of coordination takes tangible form, for example, in a new consultation mechanism, called BercyLab, managed by the innovation task force and its team of internal experts. This new facility, located on the 4th floor, draws its inspiration from creative management in developing a support approach using agile and collaborative methods.

More generally, under the impetus of Isabelle Braun-Lemaire, former HR Director of the SG and who was appointed Secretary-General in 2017, the idea is to create a "tailor-made" action according to the types of directorates, mission or network directorates, that make up Bercy, and the specific needs that result:

> *"As regards the support functions, there is a pooling rationale which, in our ministry, is complicated. Because we have a DGFiP which does not need anyone in terms of support functions, it is autonomous. And you have a lot of people around who really need them. […] If the SG has to act, it's for them. […] You don't have to be standardized, i.e. you have to provide a different service depending on whether you are dealing with the DGFiP or with Tracfin, the CISIRH, or with small structures that have no one… which are task force administrations and not administrations with heavy networks, etc."*

At twenty years old, the SG of the economy and finance ministry is a relative newcomer and only took on its current scope in 2010. In addition to its original role of coordinating the modernization of the ministries and facilitating social dialogue, it was then given the task of steering the ministerial support functions (HR, Finance, IS, purchasing, real estate, communication), their operational application to the central services of the MEFs as well as providing support to the ministerial cabinets. In the 2010s, the context, particularly interministerial, in which the SG's actions took place changed significantly. At the beginning of 2020, the SG comprises 2,400 full-time equivalent (ETP) staff, the majority of whom work on operational management tasks. At the same time

5 See Pochard (2019), « Les personnels de Bercy. Entre excellence, corporatismes et hubris », *Pouvoirs*, 2019/1, (No. 168), pp. 73-90.

as the role of the SGs has been strengthened – at Bercy as elsewhere – the level of demands placed on them has legitimately increased, particularly at interministerial level. Furthermore, the ministers expressed interest in strengthening the coordination role entrusted to the SG, as well as its role in supporting the private offices. This change was quickly perceptible in the areas of the budget, communication and coordination of transformation issues. At the same time, the SG has taken on the task of promoting innovation and supporting the collaborative approaches of the directorates. Since 2019, the Secretary-General, assisted since 2017 by a Deputy Secretary-General with the rank of Director of Central Administration, has been strongly involved in major new issues, such as the ministerial implementation of the civil service transformation law or the coordination of the *"Bercy vert"* (Green Bercy) plan. To accompany this move towards ministerial steering of the transformations underway, the SG has just embarked on a transformation process, which should lead to a roadmap and an action plan by the end of 2020 to strengthen its steering capacity, the quality of the services it delivers and its efficiency.

Edoardo Ferlazzo is Research and Dissemination Officer, IGPDE.

Marcel Guenoun is Director of Research, IGPDE*.

Jean Dezert is Monitoring and Research Officer in Comparative Public Management, IGPDE*.

*at the time this article was written

Acknowledgements

This article is based on 29 interviews conducted with 22 respondents who worked in the SG over the period in addition to an analysis of the literature and oral and written archives. The authors sincerely thank those who agreed to be interviewed for their availability and the quality of the information they provided. Any errors or defects in the final text are unreservedly the authors'own.

This work would not have been possible without the valuable assistance of:

– The MEFR Communications Directorate (SIRCOM) teams, in particular Jean-François Poyau, François Barastier, Christophe Auduraud-Clément, Stéphane Fusier, Valentin Szejnman and Deunia Rivet.
– The Institute for Public Management and Economic Development (IGPDE) teams, in particular: Virginie Madelin, Valérie Vacher, Isabelle Roussel, Mariannick Le Diagon, David Lemaistre and Kimberley Blazicevic, and the French Postgraduate Studies for Economic Development (CHEDE) teams.
– Jean-Christophe Donnelier and Thomas Ernoult of the Regional Economic Department (SER), London, and Geert Bouckaert, Sabine Kuhlmann, Fabienne Maron and the teams at the International Institute of Administrative Sciences.

Our special thanks to François Chaussy, the memory man at the SG, for guiding us in our work.

Training for reform? Public service schools in the face of calls for modernization

Olivier Quéré

The 12th issue of *APRP* explored the theme of training public servants, and it is the paper devoted to schools of public service that is translated here. Reviewing the context in which these schools for civil servants came into being and their role in transforming public action, the paper questions their very existence and the effects of the training they provide.

Mirroring this first paper, the issue includes an article devoted to the initial training of public servants in Great Britain, with a view to international comparison. In addition, a Cross-views section opened the discussion on the learning society in a dialogue between Virginie Madelin, Director of the *Institut de la Gestion publique et du Développement économique*, the training body for employees of the economic and financial ministries, and François Taddei, a world-renowned geneticist and Director of the *Centre de recherches interdisciplinaire* ("CRI", which became the Learning Planet Institute in 2021). This issue of the magazine then turned to an international comparison, with two papers focusing on the initial training of public servants in France and the UK respectively.

https://www.cairn.info/revue-action-publique-recherche-et-pratiques-2021-3.htm

Training for reform? Public service schools in the face of calls for modernization

Olivier Quéré

The French Senior Civil Service School (ENA) – replaced by the French National Institute of Public Service (INSP) on 1 January 2022 – may well be the highest profile public administration school in France, but a multitude of public service schools offer higher and executive education courses designed to train public servants. What is the history of the emergence of these public service schools? What criticisms are made of these schools and what role do they play in transformative change for public action?

The French Senior Civil Service School (ENA), transformed into the new French National Institute of Public Service (INSP), has long been a subject of disquiet due to a combination of at least three types of criticism (Eymeri-Douzans, 2019). First, the school has been the focus of politico-media complex criticism: ever since its establishment in 1945, many political commentators, experts and professionals have called for a reform of the competitive entrance examination, course content and the graduate ranking system, if not purely and simply the closure of a school deemed overly "elitist" and "technocratic". ENA has also been the subject of regular criticism from its own students within the school complaining about inconsistent curricula, inapt lecturers and a tense environment laden with competition and gossip. In addition to these two thrusts, there is the criticism driven by sociological analyses, first and foremost of which is *State Nobility* by Pierre Bourdieu published in French in 1989, which did much to popularise the image of a senior civil service closed shop with its homophilic recruitment profile and cliquishness.

However, alongside ENA are to be found a multitude of public service schools offering higher and executive education courses, generally under ministry oversight, to train civil service engineers (Ecole Polytechnique, Mines Paris – PSL, National School of Civil Engineering renamed the Ecole des Ponts ParisTech engineering institute, ENTPE Graduate School of Civil, Environmental and Urban Engineering, etc.), administrative middle managers (regional administration institutes), magistrates (National School for the Judiciary), inspectors and controllers (customs, tax, labour, education, etc.), penitentiary staff (French National Correctional Administration Academy – ENAP), senior local administration managers (National Institute for Local Studies – INET), veterinary surgeons (National School of Veterinary Services), and so on. Often less in the media and political spotlight, these schools are nevertheless the subject of regular reforms which, although differing in scale, show the – sometimes strategic – importance that certain senior administrators place on their existence and work.

As an object of criticism and, at the same time, many cosmetic changes, the public service schools have prompted questions about their very existence: what purpose do they serve? Asking this candid question is tantamount to asking about the effects of the training. If it has no effect, then it serves no purpose. Yet if it is considered that the training does have effects, what purpose does it serve and, more importantly, who does it serve?

Obviously, public service training serves a direct purpose for the students who learn from these schools how to become public servants. Yet it also serves the interests of the administrative players, tempted to use these courses as leverage to reform the administration more broadly. It may therefore be considered that students need to be trained in reform precepts to subsequently embody them in their work and support them in the departments, agencies and administrations in which they work. Seen as both reform drivers and targets, the schools have hence been a central focus of the reconfigurations in the administration at large for

the last 30 years (Bezes, 2009). To what extent are public service schools open to changes in public action and intentions to modernise?

To further understand the reform uses made of public service schools, this article first looks back over the emergence of civil service training courses before drawing on available studies and an original study of the regional administration institutes (Quéré, 2020) to show the tension apparent in civil service training courses: the teaching of position, hierarchy and bureaucracy in general appears to come a cropper over the tendency to want to turn the schools into state reform laboratories.

Training to serve the state

Public service schools started to take shape as such in the Napoleonic period. As pointed out by Ezra Suleiman, Napoleon Bonaparte took the example of top universities such as the Ecole Polytechnique and the National School of Civil Engineering, established during the revolutionary period and under the Ancien Régime, to inform his plans for secondary education reform (Suleiman, 1979, p. 38). Napoleon's purpose was first and foremost political: the entire education system was designed not so much to educate the masses as to train future "servants of the state" able to supply the necessary skills to conduct affairs of state.

The instrumental aspect of the schools was hence not born of the recent administrative reforms: the alignment of all the curricula, standardisation of the competitive entrance examinations for the top universities and, more broadly, rationalisation of the administrative organisation under the Consulate and the Empire defined the shape of the state officials who would soon come to be called "civil servants" tasked mainly with supporting government action. The higher education institutions hence resembled a power tool that could be used to build an obedient, loyal elite. This explains the formation of a state monopoly on higher education courses training civil servants as early as the 19th century.

Whereas the first top universities enabled a rapid formation of high-ranking civil service technical and military corps, the matter of "general" senior civil servants hit a series of stumbling blocks. Given that they were not attached to a specific ministry, as was the civil engineering corps to the Ministry for Infrastructure and the engineering corps to the Ministry for Industry, the "administrators" became the focus of intra-government conflicts. Many endeavours throughout the 19th century to establish common training for all senior civil servants met with resistance from the "line" ministries, protective of their prerogatives in matters of training and careers management for their own staff.

One example of this is the failure of the first "Senior Civil Service School" proposed by Hyppolyte Carnot in 1848 when he was Minister of Public Instruction under the French Provisional Government: the plan to create a single, general "interministerial" training course for senior civil servants met with hostility from many ministries (Wright, 1976). Among these, the National Education Ministry played a particular role in that it sought to protect the monopoly of the law faculties in training the nation's elite.

This opposition explains the difficult birth of the French Senior Civil Service School (ENA) in 1945 (Gatti-Montain, 1987) and that of the regional administration institutes set up in 1970 to train public service middle managers (Quéré, 2017). The late appearance of interministerial schools for general senior civil servants was consequently due primarily to the intra-government antagonism that played out among ministerial players, far more than it was due to a fundamental fear of "administrative power" undermining governmental political power and thereby popular sovereignty.

Various, and sometimes contradictory, political and administrative input went into the civil servant schools thus set up. They therefore emerged as one of the key elements gradually establishing the administration's independence from the political sphere and fuelling the process of bureaucratic construction (Dreyfus, 2000). What theoretical and practical grounding do these schools give civil service students and how are these principles internalised in practice?

Learning bureaucracy

Max Weber considered "vocational" training for public servants, in the same way as the competitive examination and the career, as one of the components of "bureaucratic administration" typical of rational-legal authority (Weber, 1995).

In Weber's ideal-type, the schools are one of the elements of the rationalisation of government activities. As such, they provide a "qualification" that appears to be geared to the administrative rules. Consequently, it is not surprising that the curriculum on these courses consists essentially of knowledge revolving around a "general" teaching standard (Biland and Gally, 2018) to give students what they need for the exercise of public service: whether legal knowledge or focused more on

engineering sciences, this knowledge is designed to provide them with a grounding in the work expected of them when they enter the civil service.

Such is historically the case with the civil service engineering schools, where courses focus primarily on public service in practice interfaced with disciplines such as engineering sciences, statistics and more or less "general" subjects that, in return, define the ranking of the schools on the top university scoreboard (Gervais, 2007, Delespierre, 2015).

Studies conducted at the French Senior Civil Service School (ENA) have found a prevalence of ritual conventions in the school to which the students were expected to conform (Eymeri-Douzans, 2001). In this self-styled "general" training school, knowledge generally matters less than style, form and skills since senior civil servants are essentially required to produce comparative summaries of different political positions in order to inform policy or "format" it for the administration.

At administrative middle management level, such as in the regional administration institutes, "general" skills are undercut by more technical skills, such as learning software, by and large equated with "dirty work" (Hughes, 1984 [1962]) delegated to subordinate staff by senior civil servants wanting to keep their monopoly on more prestigious tasks such as public policymaking and decision support (Quéré, 2020).

The hierarchy of schools therefore shapes a hierarchy of administrative tasks, revealing a great deal about the division of labour – both mechanical and symbolic – running top-down through the departments and administrations. At the top of the administrative hierarchy, the top universities, which train students in power even as they are structured by it, tend to reproduce ruling class positions. The top universities thereby produce a "State Nobility" by turning the civil service students into "holders of a legitimate monopoly on a social virtue or competence in the juridical sense of the term, that is to say a legally recognised capacity to wield a form of power that is effective because it is legitimate," (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 118). Through their contact with power, the administrations'senior civil servants produce briefs, proposals and summaries used to both translate political decisions into administrative forms (Eymeri-Douzans, 2003) and endeavour to convince members of parliament (Laurens, 2013).

Civil service middle managers are therefore required in their training to internalise their position in the hierarchy of administrative tasks: neither too low down the chain of command to ensure that ENA graduates can delegate their tasks efficiently, nor too high up the ladder of prestige to reserve the tasks of policymaking and decision-making for the nobility of their order. Law appears to be the typical instrument of this subjection: for middle managers, learning to respect the law consists of learning to respect the hierarchy (Quéré, 2015).

Consequently, the public service schools dispense an entire education in bureaucracy, that is to say a work space hierarchically segmented into "task silos" specific to each occupational group. The point is to secure a position in this hierarchy and be aware of that position. The official curriculum generally pursues this goal, but a more implicit, "hidden" skillset agenda firmly anchors bureaucratic practices to roles.

To what extent has this training in bureaucracy been redefined by the reform policies seen in the administration since the mid-1980s?

State reform laboratories

The public service schools have long been impervious to state reform policies. Calls for modernization are more the pursuit of senior civil servant converts (Bezes, 2012) who tend to bypass the schools to impose their precepts. Yet little by little, some public service schools have gradually changed, primarily under the "professionalisation" banner.

Seeking to distance themselves from the academic model championed by the law schools (and hence the National Education Ministry), the public service schools seized on vague labels in vogue in the administration in the 1980s such as the "applied school". The "general" courses focused more on methodological and instrumental instruction, as shown by the teaching of law centred more on practical experience-based knowledge. This can be seen from the emergence of training in applied legal techniques such as court proceedings and the drafting of legislation which, in both ENA and the regional administration institutes, is defined as "the art of writing law" and is taught as a practical subject. The point is not just to know the law, but to know how to apply it.

The move to "professionalise" (Boussard *et al.*, 2010) flanks a "managerialisation" movement in training: so-called "management" modules, although protean, represent a growing proportion of course studies. "Management" courses are an offshoot of the "professionalisation" of training in that learning management is associated with instrumental and methodological skills.

Students work increasingly on case studies (real or hypothetical) and simulation exercises and even attend simulation workshops, sometimes led by actors (see box).

Simulation workshops in the regional administration institutes

Simulation workshops are held in the regional administration institutes in classes called "Public Speaking", "What is a Manager?" and "Teamwork". All of these classes are grouped under the "management" heading.

The simulation workshops take place as follows: first, the facilitator details a scenario and explains everyone's roles. The student placed in the situation in front of the class has to respond in situ to the constraints of the exercise in interaction with the actors.

For example, in the "What is a Manager?" class, a student is placed in the situation of an administrative officer in a prefecture. This student has to put together the work and holiday schedule for subordinates, medium-rank civil servants played by actors, who each have their own constraints: one agent has to finish every day at 4 p.m., another has to take their holiday in August, and so on. The administrative officer's role is to balance these constraints, even if that means being an adjustment variable themselves. Their work is made very hard by the actors, who take an uncompromising stance with respect to their individual constraints.

This type of exercise is supposed to prepare the future manager for the main managerial techniques. It demonstrates both the level of "professionalisation" of the course – in terms of using instrumental know-how – and the importance of management and managerial instruction in the training of public service managers.

Although the "professionalisation" and "managerialisation" training processes may look similar, the fact of the matter is that the gradual introduction of management and managerial skills into the public service schools has considerably changed the structure and content of the courses, and thereby the conception of the civil service. A close look at this type of know-how and how it is taught reveals the extent to which the budgetary constraint is naturalised and how students are expected to build their professional practices around the optimisation of resources (Quéré, 2020). Classes given by "public management" experts, sometimes from consultancy firms, reinforce this tendency. The reformers consequently see civil service students as having to "lead the change" in the administration and the schools as the springboard for this change. Although there is no way of telling whether this enterprise will be successful, we are seeing an attempt here at the "internal" construction of a manager state through the public service schools.

However, "management" skills are not catching on in all the schools in the same way and not all of them are taking on board these changes in the same manner, giving rise to variations in training practices and uses. At ENA, for example, the emergence of "management" stemmed from a reconfiguration of the legal syllabus geared to the introduction of management and economic modules (Biland and Kolopp, 2013). In the regional administration institutes, the "management" training that started appearing in courses in the mid-1980s gained traction all the more easily in the 2000s since it effectively raised the profile of the public "manager" as an independent figure with decision-making capacity – the exact opposite of the figure of the ENA graduate as a "minion" associated with the work of administrative officers. Similarly, in the civil service engineering schools, the introduction of "management" could be seen as a resource for the civil service ranks, as is the case with the civil engineering corps which took advantage of the managerial training reform to boost its prestige and keep its place in the state system (Gervais, 2007).

To conclude, training is clearly a subject of reform ambitions, but variations in uptake approaches give rise to disconnects between intentions and practice. By "leveraging" these reforms, certain groups of civil servants play the positioning and bureaucratic ranking game.

The bureaucratic objective of training and skilling on which the public service schools were built was flanked by a purely political purpose from their creation through to the managerial changes of the early 19th century: today's civil service students are the malleable, loyal public servants of tomorrow. The many and varied schools therefore serve as much the civil servants as the

many reform intentions. Yet bureaucracy is a slow-changing institution and the civil service schools, a cornerstone of the institution in France, evolve at the same pace.

Olivier Quéré is Senior Lecturer in Political Science at the University of Strasbourg and author of "L'atelier de l'État : des cadres intermédiaires en formation" (Rennes, PUR, 2020).

References

Bezes P. (**2009**),
Réinventer l'État, les réformes de l'administration française (1962-2008), Paris, PUF.

Bezes P. (**2012**),
« État, experts et savoirs néo-managériaux. Les producteurs et diffuseurs du New Public Management en France depuis les années 1970 », *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, No. 193, 3, pp. 16–37.

Biland É. and Kolopp S. (**2013**),
« La fabrique de la pensée d'État », *Gouvernement et action publique*, 2, No. 2, pp. 221–248.

Biland E. and Gally N. (**2018**),
"Civil Servants and Policy Analysis in Central Government", in Halpern C., Hassenteufel P. and Zittoun P. (Ed), *Policy Analysis in France*, The Policy Press, pp. 101–118.

Bourdieu P. (**1996**),
The State Nobility: Elite Schools in the Field of Power, Stanford University Press.

Boussard V., Demazière D. and Milburn P. (**Ed**) (**2010**),
L'injonction au professionnalisme. Analyses d'une dynamique plurielle, Rennes, Presses Universitaires de Rennes.

Delespierre A. (**2015**),
« Des entreprises dans les salles de classe ? La révolution conservatrice des grandes écoles d'ingénieurs », *Cahiers de la recherche sur l'éducation et les savoirs*, 14, 68-92.

Dreyfus F. (**2000**),
L'invention de la bureaucratie. Servir l'État en France, en Grande-Bretagne et aux États-Unis (XVIII^e^-XX^e^ siècles), Paris, La découverte.

Eymeri-Douzans J.M. (**2001**),
La fabrique des énarques, Paris, Economica, « Études politiques ».

Eymeri-Douzans J.M. (**2003**),
« Frontières ou marches ? De la contribution de la haute administration à la production du politique », *in* Lagroye J. (Ed), *La politisation*, Paris, Belin, 2003, pp. 47–77.

Eymeri-Douzans J.M. (**2019**),
« L'État se meurt, l'État demeure », AOC médias, online article, 29 April 2019, https:/aoc. media/analyse/2019/04/29/ lena-se-meure-letat-demeure/

Forquin J.-C. (**2008**),
Sociologie du curriculum, Rennes, Presses universitaires de Rennes.

Gatti-Montain J. (**1987**),
Le système d'enseignement du droit en France, Lyon, Presses universitaires de Lyon.

Gervais J. (**2007**),
La réforme des cadres de l'action publique ou la fabrique d'un « nouveau » corps des Ponts et Chaussées. Impératifs managériaux, logiques administratives et stratégies corporatistes (fin du XIX^e^ siècle), Political science PhD dissertation, Lyon, IEP de Lyon.

Gervais J. (**2007**),
« Former des hauts fonctionnaires techniques comme des managers de l'action publique. L'"identité managériale", le corps des Ponts et Chaussées et son rapport à l'État », *Politix*, No. 79, 3, pp. 101–123.

Hughes E. C. (**1984**) [**1962**],
The Sociological Eye. Selected Papers, Transaction Publishers.

Laurens S. (**2013**),
« Une sociologie de la note administrative : Notations sur un instrument du pouvoir administratif… », *in* J.-M. Eymeri-Douzans, G. Bouckaert (eds), *La France et ses administrations : Un état des savoirs*, pp. 379-410, Brussels, Bruylant-DeBoeck.

Quéré O. (**2015**),
« La fabrique des cadres intermédiaires de la fonction publique. Enseigner et assigner un positionnement aux attachés dans les Instituts régionaux d'administration », *Gouvernement et action publique*, 4, Vol. 4, pp. 33–54.

Quéré O. (**2017**),
« Construire l'État par son milieu. Les transformations du mandat des cadres intermédiaires de l'administration », *Sociologie du travail*, Vol. 59 – No. 3 | July-September 2017.

Quéré O. (**2020**),
L'Atelier de l'État. Des cadres intermédiaires en formation, Rennes, PUR.
Rosanvallon P. (**1990**),
L'État en France de 1789 à nos jours, Paris, Seuil.
Saby O. (**2012**),
Promotion Ubu Roi, Paris, Flammarion.
Suleiman E. (**1979**),
Les élites en France. Grands corps et grandes écoles, Paris, Éd. du Seuil, « Sociologie politique », 1979.
Weber M. (**1995**),
Économie et société I. Les catégories de la sociologie, Paris, Agora.
Wright V. (**1976**),
« L'École nationale d'administration de 1848-1849 : un échec révélateur », *Revue historique*, 255, 1, pp. 21–42.

From administered prices to composed prices: public pricing methods and developments

Fabien Éloire and Jean Finez

There are many issues surrounding the pricing of public services, which was the focus of the 14th issue of *APRP*. Translated here, the first study documented the major historical developments in pricing models within the public sector, while the second looked at the theme of pricing for public services through a cross-examination between Martine Long, lecturer in public law, and Laurent Probst, managing director of *Île-de-France mobilités*, the public body responsible for organising transport in the Paris region, which provided an opportunity to examine the definitions, objectives and challenges of public pricing. The first paper, presented below, documents the major historical developments in pricing models in the public sector, while the second article in the issue compares different pricing models in several key public sector areas (hospital care, nursing homes, public employment services…).

https://www.cairn.info/revue-action-publique-recherche-et-pratiques-2022-2.htm

From administered prices to composed prices: public pricing methods and developments

Fabien Éloire and Jean Finez

This article focuses on the history of public pricing developments. It draws on public sector price modelling to show how different price-setting methods have been used over time, evidencing changes in the way government sees its role with respect to public service users.

How are prices set for public sector activities? And how have the pricing models for these activities evolved? Such are the questions that this article sets out to answer, drawing on the wealth of sociological literature on prices.[1] Prices can be defined in brief as the monetary counterpart for a right to purchase or use a good, service or labour. The approach adopted here considers prices from both their economic and social angles. For a better understanding of pricing mechanisms, we put aside the classic distinction between *market prices* and *administered prices*. This distinction reduces the diversity of forms of monetary trade and assumes a contradiction of principle between government and market that is inconsistent with observations on the ground.

The overview presented in this article highlights that public pricing is based historically on a variety of price determination models. To better grasp and understand their developments, we propose using a price typology built on two key criteria recurrent in sociological analyses of prices: 1) the moment when the price is set (either before or during the transaction), and 2) the level of competition (low or high) to which the price is subject. Cross-tabulation of these two criteria produces four types of prices, each based on specific price-setting mechanisms (see box).

Box: Four types of prices by price-setting method

Price-setting timing \ Level of competition	High	Zero or low
During the transaction	a. Self-regulated (stock exchange listing)	d. Negotiated (crate of fruit at a wholesaler)
Before the transaction	c. Composed (supermarket product)	b. Administered (train ticket)

The "self-regulated" price relates the most to the "law of supply and demand": the price is determined during the transaction in a situation where competition is in full play. The "administered price" is set before any transaction, often by a public institution. It is generally found in monopolistic economic activities. The "composed price", which is a type of price frequently found in the market sphere, is already displayed at the point of sale and is therefore known to potential buyers before the transaction. Its determination takes account of the prices set by competitors. Lastly, the "negotiated price" is set in a bilateral trade situation distanced, to a certain extent, from competition. It is therefore the negotiations between the parties that set a price during the transaction.

1 See Éloire and Finez (2021) for a summary.

The rates charged for public sector activities are generally considered to be *administered prices*. However, the typology usefully shows this interpretation to be an oversimplification. Historical pricing developments even reveal rather a tendency to turn public rates into *composed prices*. They may well be set mainly before the transaction, placing them in the bottom row of the table in the box. Yet although it stands to reason that competition would be zero or low – due to the fact that the activities are conducted by the public sector or with strict government oversight – a more in-depth analysis reveals that competition does sometimes have an influence, which would then make them composed prices.[2]

The first part of the article presents public pricing from the point of view of administered prices, focusing on their historical role as instruments to make public services affordable for all. The second part presents the transition to the composed price model. This change can be seen in historically monopolistic public activities: consideration of competition – real or mimicked – in price determination is one of the drivers of a new public economic management model. The last section discusses the most recent market shift in terms of price individualisation. This movement goes hand in hand with the liberalisation of public services and the boom in digital technologies.

Administered prices as instruments of affordability for all

History bears much evidence of administered price policies. Since the Antiquity, public authorities have endeavoured to control prices, such as wheat prices (Polanyi, 1977), and more generally prices for goods and services considered to be essential. Roman Emperor Diocletian is known for his edict promulgated in 301 AD, which fixed ceilings on prices for over 900 commodities and on wages for 130 different grades of labour (Michell, 1947). The medieval period was also marked by the adoption of various laws and regulations designed to freeze cereal prices, for example (Feller, 2011).

Although freedom of pricing started to take root in the 18th century, *customary prices* nonetheless continued to exist. In the event of an increase in food prices or a decrease in wages preventing the poor from buying bread, flour and cereals, the masses engaged in the intimidation of merchants as the community looked on (Thompson, 1971). This moral economy of the crowd moved into action when the authorities failed to regulate speculation by merchants.

The second half of the 19th century marked an important moment in the history of administered prices. In France, and in other European countries, the development of the modern state and the industrial revolution saw the birth and institutionalisation of public service networks and grids: postal services, rail transport, and gas and electricity distribution. These activities had the particularity of having high fixed costs and increasing returns to scale. As such, they were considered to be natural monopolies and were run by the administration or subject to close government oversight. In practice, access to these services was generally based on *tariff equalisation*, i.e. equitable distribution of costs among users (Jeannot, 1998). This system, based on a principle of national solidarity, is designed to provide access to public services for geographically isolated people by offering them the service at a selling price below production costs, which are high due to the low level of demand. In practice, the losses are offset by revenue from other users to whom the service is sold at a price higher than cost, this revenue being generally supplemented by revenue from taxes paid by all taxpayers, irrespective of whether they use the service.

Tariff equalisation is not a standardised doctrine (Poupeau, 2007). Price-setting practices for public services depend on the public policy objectives and concepts of tariff equity specific to each activity. These concepts are the result of social games and power relations between actors in the government and the companies concerned. The history of the French postal service in the 1840s shows that postage price based on letter *weight*, thereby neutralising distance in the pricing of the service, was not initially self-evident (Oger, 2000). By contrast, in the railway sector, a consensus formed in the second half of the 19th century around a dual principle: 1) for passenger transport, base the price on the *distance* travelled, and 2) for merchandise transport, do not apply tariff equalisation and set the price on *costs* and the *value of the merchandise* (*ad valorem* tariff) (Grall, 2004). In electricity, geographic equalisation whereby a uniform rate per kilowatt-hour applies across the territory (rural and urban areas) was not introduced until after the Second World War (Poupeau, 2007) when the private electric utility companies were nationalised.

2 The other two price forms, *self-regulated* and *negotiated*, can also apply in certain highly specific cases.

Composed prices as economic management tools

In the second half of the 20th century, prices made the transition from instruments of public service affordability to management tools for the neoliberal-oriented economy. In post-war France, tariff equalisation was the norm in the large national corporations such as Société Nationale des Chemins de Fer Français (SNCF), Charbonnages de France, Électricité de France (EDF) and Gaz de France (GDF). However, in the late 1940s, senior civil service corps engineers trained in mathematical economics set about trying to prove that the principle of subsidisation underlying tariff equalisation ran counter to the public interest. Its disconnection from production costs meant that the pricing method did not play its role as a consumer choice steering mechanism. Although they did not dispute that the nationalised companies should be monopolies, they called for a marginal cost pricing policy (Allais, 1943) on the grounds of economic efficiency. It was argued that differential pricing in accordance with marginalist economic theory[3] would bring selling prices into line with production costs and hence *mimic the market* despite the monopolistic nature of their activities. However, putting this idea into practice was no mean task since it assumed technical resources and considerable mathematical skills.

The first forms of differential pricing appeared at EDF in the 1950s (Yon, 2014) before spreading to the SNCF in the 1960s-1970s (Finez, 2014) and telecommunications in the 1980s (Bidet, 2010). Subsequently, at the turn of the 2000s, public grid and network services were gradually opened up to competition, thereby speeding the pace of pricing method changes. Yet the introduction of market mechanisms is not a linear process, as seen from the case of energy. The unexpected rise in electricity rates following market liberalisation forced the French government to reregulate under pressure from large industrial energy-intensive firms and once again regulate the rates (Reverdy, 2014).

Although the government continued to manage the sale of electricity, the transition to differential pricing saw a shift to another type of price: composed rather than administered. Whereas the price was still set before the transaction, it now factored in the level of demand compared to supply: prices rose in peak consumption periods and fell in off-peak periods.

New pricing methods were conceived following the "engineer-economist" period.[4] By making competition a pillar of the price-setting mechanism, these methods moved increasingly away from the pricing practices of the historical administered price standard. The overhauls of the healthcare funding system and the spending cuts that accompanied the spread of New Public Management make for an excellent analysis of these changes. In the 1980s, the government introduced a cost accounting system to record and measure hospital activities (Belorgey, 2010). It then established an Aggregate Operating Grant (DGF), which set a firm budget for each hospital. In 2004, it adopted the fee-structure per activity system (T2A) as the last step in the government's financial and accounting rationalisation for the hospitals. This system established *yardstick competition* between the establishments.

Assessments of the T2A, which was promoted by reformers in the 2000s as a way of reducing hospital spending and increasing cost effectiveness, have revealed a number of adverse effects (Burnel, 2017). As hospitals'revenues depend on their activity, the T2A can prompt unnecessary treatments and forms of patient abuse, especially in obstetrics (Juven *et al.*, 2019).[5] The new hospital pricing model is based on opaque cost measurements that do not take into account the diversity of hospital situations (Juven, 2016). This controversial fee-structure per activity system is still a subject of debate today among the players concerned (associations, elected officials, healthcare professionals, etc.). This observation does not

3 Marginalist economic theory, or neoclassical theory, posits that economic efficiency is achieved when price is equal to "marginal cost" (i.e. the cost of producing another unit of output), as is the case in a pure and perfect competition market. The definition of marginal cost was much debated in the large national corporations.

4 The term refers to French engineers who graduated from top French universities (such as the École Polytechnique), often from high-ranking technical corps (mining and civil engineering) and trained in economics. Engineer-economists played an important role in introducing new management methods in business and public administrations in France in the post-war decades (Fourcade, 2009).

5 The authors stress that, in obstetrics, "the fee-structure per activity system encourages acceleration of the process of childbirth, the disproportionate use of synthetic ocytocin (to stimulate labour) and caesarean sections."

apply to hospitals alone. A similar dynamic can be observed in retirement homes for dependent elderly people (Xing, 2018).

Medication pricing has also seen various changes. Drug prices were totally administered through to the 1980s in keeping with the notions of social justice applied by the state (Nouguez and Benoit, 2017). However, pharmaceutical firms became more involved in pricing negotiations in the mid-1990s when the emergence of a European common market for drugs started attaching more importance to competitive mechanisms. Firms participate in the price-setting process on the Economic Committee on Health Care Products (CEPS). Although the government oversees regard for extra-economic motives (moral, justice and public interest), the neoliberal climate has prompted it to let private players and market mechanisms play a growing role. Drugs are assessed and rated based on the estimate of the service they render. The most innovative drugs are assessed from a competitive angle considering the prices practised in other European countries. The oldest drugs and generic medicines are assessed in terms of production costs. The system has an incentivising purpose, since the high prices for drugs with therapeutic added value encourage manufacturers to adopt this type of production.

Price individualisation as ways of mimicking the market

The decline of the tariff equalisation model combined with the gradual spread of the differential pricing principle has opened up the public sector to new price-setting techniques borrowed from the market sector. The development entails using dynamic pricing devices to personalise prices, drawing on the exponential growth in IT techniques and tools. Prices are still set before the transaction, but pricing experts now take optimal consideration of competition. One of these new pricing models is the *yield management* marketing technique (also called *revenue management*). The purpose of such a device is to sell "the right product to the right customer at the right time for the right price" (Cross, 1997). Invented in the airline industry in the United States at a time of deregulation (Boyd, 2007), its principle is to maximise profits by increasing the number of airline seats sold and charging each customer the price closest to the amount they are willing to pay to travel.

Yield management was introduced in France in the 1990s for the sale of SNCF high-speed train tickets ahead of the European liberalisation of the railway market (Finez, 2014). The challenge was to use information technology both to transform each sale into a bilateral transaction (Callon, 2017) and to rebrand the product sold. The purpose was no longer to sell a transport service for a standard seat from point A to point B, but tickets for individual journeys with variable fares depending on the date of purchase, departure time and options chosen. This approach leveraged market power by placing customer demand in competition. Despite a great deal of political and social reluctance, the SNCF's senior management eventually managed to convince the transport ministry and user associations that the pricing mechanism complied with its public service missions. The yield management system has indeed filled more seats on trains and thereby has the potential to reduce average ticket prices.

Dynamic pricing has benefited from the development of e-commerce and the big data it generates (Ezrachi and Stucke, 2016). Sellers can track internet users by means of IP addresses, cookies and logins. Geolocation, operating systems and browsing histories have all become strategic elements of information in the quest for price personalisation. Since the 2000s, colossal resources have been invested in infrastructures to develop this new pricing method. Consultancy firms specialising in yield management strategies have mushroomed. This movement echoes the trend observed in electricity where liberalisation compelled suppliers to build increasingly sophisticated calculation capacities and take on pricing experts to be able to "formulate" prices (Reverdy, 2014).

Many users are hostile to the advanced forms of variable pricing found in France today in rail transport and other sectors. They go against the grain because they are at odds with the historical benchmark of the time-stable price. Dynamic pricing also effectively ranks user-consumers and prioritises demand from the most affluent customers, in contradiction to the principle of equal treatment. Experiments have been conducted in the United States to extend these mechanisms to new activities, such as electricity distribution (Irwin, 2017). In the absence of regulation, the scale-up of such a system could have devastating impacts such as forcing the poor, including the most vulnerable, to turn down their heating in the winter. If such a policy were adopted in France, it could mark the demise of the principle of national solidarity and toll the knell of the welfare state. Nevertheless, digital tools do

not necessarily have to serve neoliberal policies. Automation can be used for egalitarian policies.[6]

More generally, dynamic pricing often drives a change in user attitudes. Far from the public service model, the practice encourages users to take advantage of situations and see life as a series of opportunities to be grasped (Boltanski and Esquerre, 2017). This change driven by the new pricing methods is a challenge to the social contract forged in the 20th century. In a fragmenting society, the user is increasingly considered as a *homo economicus* and, by means of a theory-effect, increasingly behaves as such. In addition, it could be posited that the people who benefit the most from dynamic pricing systems are those who are already the most endowed with cultural, economic and social resources. In other words, yield management and the pricing mechanisms it generates could well further increase inequalities. Governments need to consider the effects on social cohesion of such systems driven by purely financial criteria.

Conclusion

This outline of the history of public pricing forms sheds particular light on the developments in policy and forms of social unity in contemporary France. The transition from administered to composed pricing has done nothing to change the fact that prices are displayed and set before the transaction. However, service users are now increasingly considered as customers, i.e. as economic agents capable of basing their consumer demand on price signals, such that the particularities of pricing methods in the public sector are fading. This trend could no doubt be interpreted as an expression of the "standardisation" of businesses and public administrations (Coutant et al., 2020).

"Price formulation" (Callon, 2017) as an economic behavioural management instrument is basically evolving in two different directions. First, it is increasingly factoring in competition, to the extent of being equipped with the means to mimic the way a competitive market works using powerful calculation resources. Second, it is personalising prices using the mass of data generated by the digitalisation of the economy. In both cases, the use of information and communication technologies is decisive. Yet the use of these new tools in no way determines the price-setting philosophy. Pricing policy orientations are steered by more than just accounting choices. They also reflect a certain concept of government and new representations of economic justice and efficiency associated with changes in forms of governance among the politico-administrative elite and senior management in public sector establishments and corporations.

The way public pricing methods have developed since the 1980s could be seen as way to analyse historical changes in the economy. Administered prices and tariff equalisation practices may well be far from a thing of the past, but their decline in favour of prices factoring in competition is redolent of neoliberal ideology (Denord, 2002) whose agenda has been consistent with government action in recent decades. And note that this is government built on a new role of purposefully reducing its action in the economic sphere and developing to the maximum the use of market mechanisms by legal means. By factoring in competition, public pricing is becoming a real economic management instrument. It remains to be seen how pricing methods will develop following the economic, social, health and geopolitical crises of this last decade.

Fabien Éloire is Senior Lecturer in Sociology at the University of Lille.

Jean Finez is Senior Lecturer in Sociology at the University of Grenoble.

6 Such is the case, for example, in Portugal where energy rates are based on user-taxpayer incomes: since the 2010s, automatic reductions have been applied to electricity rates for the most vulnerable, hence reducing inequalities and the rate of non-beneficiaries of the support payments (Carthéry, 2020).

References

Allais M. (**1943**),
À la recherche d'une discipline économique, published by the author in 1943. Reprinted in 1952 under the title of *Traité d'économie pure*, Paris, Imprimerie nationale/CNRS.

Belorgey N. (**2010**),
L'hôpital sous pression. Enquête sur le "nouveau management public", La Découverte.

Bidet A. (**2005**),
"La mesure du travail téléphonique. Le cas des opératrices (1910-1938)", *Histoire & mesure*, Vol. 20, no. 3-4, pp. 15-47.

Boltanski L., Esquerre A. (**2017**),
Enrichissement. Une critique de la marchandise, Paris, Gallimard.

Boyd E. A. (**2007**),
The Future of Pricing. How Airline Ticket Pricing Has Inspired a Revolution, New York, Palgrave Macmillan.

Burnel P. (**2017**),
"L'impact de la T2A sur la gestion des établissements publics de santé", *Journal de gestion et d'économie médicales*, Vol. 35, no. 2-3, 2017, pp. 67-79.

Callon M. (**2017**),
L'emprise des marchés. Comprendre leur fonctionnement pour pouvoir les changer, Paris, La Découverte.

Carthéry Y. (**2020**),
"Portugal : réduire les inégalités par l'automatisation", *Note de l'Institut de la gestion publique et du développement économique*, Ministère de l'économie, des finances et de la relance, 3 pages. Online version (accessed 17 March 2022): https://www.economie.gouv.fr/igpde-editions-publications/note-reactive-portugal-2020-6

Coutant H., Finez J., Viallet-Thévenin S. (**2020**),
"Sur les chemins de la normalisation. Transformations du contrôle des entreprises publiques en France", *Revue française de sociologie*, Vol. 61, No. 3, 2020, pp. 341-372.

Cross R. (**1997**),
Revenue Management: Hard-Core Tactics for Market Domination, New York, Broadway Books.

Denord F. (**2002**),
"Le prophète, le pèlerin et le missionnaire. La circulation internationale du néo-libéralisme et ses acteurs", *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, No. 145, pp. 9-20.

Éloire F., Finez J. (**2021**),
Sociologie des prix, Paris, La Découverte.

Ezrachi A., Stucke M. (**2016**),
Virtual Competition: The Promise and Perils of the Algorithm-Driven Economy, Cambridge, Harvard University Press.

Feller L. (**2011**),
"Sur la formation des prix dans l'économie du haut Moyen Âge", *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, Vol. 66, No. 3, pp. 627-661.

Finez J. (**2014**),
"*La construction des prix à la SNCF, une socio-histoire de la tarification*. De la péréquation au *yield management* (1938-2012)", *Revue française de sociologie*, Vol. 55, No. 1, pp. 5-39.

Fourcade M. (**2009**),
Economists and Societies: Discipline and Profession in the United States, Britain, and France, 1890s to 1990s, Princeton, Princeton University Press.

Grall B. (**2004**),
Économie de forces et production d'utilités. L'émergence du calcul économique chez les ingénieurs des Ponts et Chaussées (1831-1891), Rennes, PUR (manuscript reviewed with comments by François Vatin).

Irwin N. (**2017**),
"Why surge prices make us so mad", *The New York Times*, 15 October 2017, p. 1.

Jeannot G. (**1998**),
Les usagers du service public, Que sais-je ?, Paris, PUF.

Juven P.-A. (**2016**),
Une santé qui compte ? Les coûts et les tarifs controversés de l'hôpital public, Paris, PUF.

Juven P.-A. , Pierru F., Vincent F. (**2019**),
La casse du siècle. A propos des réformes de l'hôpital public, Paris, Raisons d'agir.

Michell H. (**1947**),
"The edict of Diocletian: A study of price fixing in the Roman Empire", *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, Vol. 13, No. 1, pp. 1-12.

Nouguez É., Benoît C. (**2017**),
"Gouverner (par) les prix. La fixation des prix des médicaments remboursés en France", *Revue française de sociologie*, Vol. 58, No. 3, pp. 399-424.

Oger B. (**2000**),
"Les mutations de la Poste (1792-1990)", *Flux*, No. 42, pp. 7-21.

Polanyi K. (**1977**),
La subsistance de l'Homme. La place de l'économie dans l'histoire et dans la société, Paris, Flammarion, 2011.

Poupeau F.-M. (**2007**),
"La fabrique d'une solidarité nationale. État et élus ruraux dans l'adoption d'une péréquation des tarifs de l'électricité en France", *Revue française de science politique*, Vol. 57, No. 5, pp. 599-628.

Reverdy T. (**2014**),
La construction politique du prix de l'énergie, Paris, Presses de Sciences po.

Thompson E. P. (**1971**),
"The moral economy of the English crowd in the eighteenth century", *Past & Present*, Vol. 50, No. 1, pp. 76-136.

Xing J. (**2018**),
Dynamiques des groupes professionnels et New Public Management: l'introduction des instruments d'action publique dans la tarification des Établissements d'hébergement pour personnes âgées dépendantes (EHPAD), sociology PhD dissertation, École Normale Supérieure.

Yon G. (**2014**),
"L'économicité d'EDF", *Politix*, No. 105, pp. 91-115.

To be released in early 2024

Special Issue #2

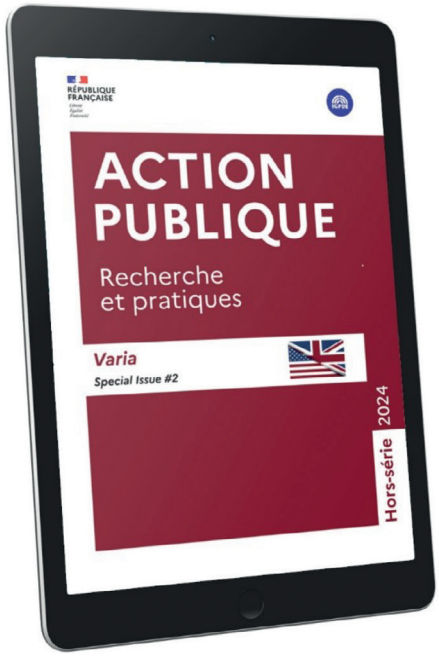

Table of contents

The meaning of work in the civil service: specific features, values and prospects
DAVID GIAUQUE AND GUILLAUME AUJALEU

The civil servant at the heart of bureaucracy?
ÉMILIEN RUIZ

France and Denmark: two models of continuing vocational training with different impacts?
CHRISTÈLE MEILLAND

Transparency in the European institutions: implementation and obstacles
STÉPHANIE NOVAK

Find us on our website:

https://www.economie.gouv.fr/igpde-editions-publications/action-publique-recherche-pratiques

Editor's Foreword
VIRGINIE MADELIN

[Cross-views] The nuts and bolts of citizen participation
TYPHANIE SCOGNAMIGLIO AND MARION CARREL

[Survey] Bercy's Secrétariat général: institutionalization and transformation (2000-2020)
EDOARDO FERLAZZO, MARCEL GUENOUN AND JEAN DEZERT

[Survey] Training for reform? Public service schools in the face of calls for modernization
OLIVIER QUÉRÉ

[Survey] From administered prices to composed prices: public pricing methods and developments
FABIEN ÉLOIRE AND JEAN FINEZ

Action publique. Recherche et pratiques *is a quarterly journal published by the Institut de la gestion publique et du développement économique. It is aimed at public sector players, academics and students wishing to keep abreast of developments in the field of public action. The journal brings together researchers and practitioners from the public sector through contributions in the form of articles, interviews and analysis notes describing administrative experiences in various countries. The journal also presents recent theses and outstanding research papers on public management.*

CAIRN.INFO
MATIÈRES À RÉFLEXION