

Training & Employment

A FRENCH NEWSLETTER FROM CEREQ AND ITS ASSOCIATED CENTRES

Vocational Training and the Role of the Regions in France The Issues Involved in Decentralisation

France has gone from having a central State which acted as "educator" to having a State which acted as "developer", operating through the intermediary of a "regionalised" plan. Then, with the economic downturn, came the time of a "regulator" State, one which began to redistribute power from the centre to the Regions. To the Regions went the role of innovation and adjustment. The centre kept control over the system through control over diplomas and the recruitment of teachers. This has brought about the question: is this situation one where the differences among regional policies threatens the oneness of the public service of education, or is this a new search for flexibility so as to obtain better territorial control over the relationship between education and development ?

Management of vocational training public policy was partially entrusted to the Regions in 1983. The Five Year Law of December 1993 relative to jobs, employment and vocational training recently widened regional powers.

The issue is the division of responsibility among the State, the regional authorities and professional organisations for defining and implementing policies and programmes for vocational training. In order to appreciate the exact nature of this issue, it must be placed in the perspective of its historical context which, through the dual process of the decentralisation and the deconcentration of the national government's actions, has tended to turn the regions into a relevant place for carrying out public policy.

1. To decentralise means to transfer decision-making powers, to share the power between the State and local authorities. To deconcentrate is to implement centrally-made policy by providing regional and local government services with a certain degree of autonomy, and to adapt the implementation of national actions to local contexts.

PRIOR TO 1982: A PERIOD OF CENTRALISED REGIONALISATION

The guiding philosophy behind the regional activity led by the State between 1950 and 1980 was based on two main ideas: first, national and regional development with the two-fold concern for facilitating the installation of the infrastructures required for economic growth and making up for the imbalance and inequalities caused by the modernisation of the social and economic system, and second, mobilisation and co-ordination of the regional players so as to promote growth. This type of philosophy did not survive the reversal of the economic situation which had begun in 1973 and by the end of the 1970's had settled into a lasting economic crisis. Though the objectives of integration and territorial equity were not totally abandoned, government intervention thereafter placed the emphasis on each region's ability to contribute to its own recovery and thus to the national recovery. In doing so, the State turned over full responsibility to the Regions in certain fields affecting economic development, particularly in the area of manpower training.

CENTRE D'ETUDES ET DE RECHERCHES SUR LES QUALIFICATIONS



Prior to 1982, the system for vocational training was still characterised by strong centralisation coupled with a process of "schooling" of the vocational training mechanisms. For initial training, following a period where local initiative had been very strong, the unification and centralisation process, which had begun in 1942 under the Vichy government and had continued after the end of the Second World War, was expressed by the affirmation of the State's role in defining the content of standardised diplomas and in the construction of a uniform educational system. In 1948, the old apprenticeship centres came under the authority of a national technical educational authority (Formation Emploi, 1989). The management of the resulting national educational system relied on the division of the country into Academies, which were similar to the Regions, but which largely escaped from the overall movement of deconcentrating national activity to the territorial level.

Indeed, although decentralisation has since become a matter of fact, it is only very recently that the Rectors of these Academies acquired a degree of autonomy for implementing the objectives from the Education Ministry with consideration for local and regional reality.

National intervention in terms of continuing vocational education is recent. It first occurred in 1946 with the creation of a national body which was assigned the task of meeting the training needs of workers in the national reconstruction period which followed the war. (This was the AFPMO, which became the A.F.P.A. in 1966). It was also evident in the decision to use highly structured social dialogue at the national level between employers' associations and workers' unions; to the extent that the interprofessional agreements that were reached most often became law. Throughout this period, on the whole, continuing vocational training in France left very little leeway for regional and local decision makers to act.

However, deconcentration and planned regional action were to intervene sooner in this field than for initial vocational training.

The creation of Regional Public Establishments (EPR) in 1972 constituted both the culmination of a model which

was distinctively marked by the State's (which had remained highly centralised) concern for efficiency on the territorial scale and the beginning of the recognition of the need for autonomy for regional decision makers. The Regional Development Plans remained under final responsibility of the Regional Prefect.

IN 1982: CREATION OF A REGIONAL POWER AND RESTRICTED TRANSFER OF AUTHORITY

Following the Law of March 1982, which set in place the conditions surrounding the decentralisation process, a series of laws (1982, 1985, 1987) defined the division of authority among the Districts, the Departments, the Regions and the State over initial and continuing vocational training, as well as the transfer of the corresponding resources from the national government to the local authorities. These laws also provided for consultative bodies within Regions as well as a national committee for regional programmes co-ordination (see "in Focus" below). The shared responsibilities which resulted from these legal arrangements brought about a two-pronged situation: on one hand, common law authority in continuing vocational training and apprenticeships was transferred to the Regions; on the other hand, a system of shared responsibility between the local authorities and the State for vocational, technical and general education.

The school system: *It is run by the State and local authorities for school-based training. The State retains control over the management of the public service of teaching, while local authorities are given the responsibility for the construction, maintenance and physical operation of the buildings themselves.*

Apprenticeship: *The Regions are left entirely free to evaluate the needs and organise the means to meet them. Nevertheless, the State remains in charge of defining the content of the courses taken by the apprentices and classroom inspection.*

Continued vocational training: *Each region sets up a regional training programme and finances it on a yearly basis. The State retains the prerogative for the legislative and regulatory framework.*

Each region set up a regional training programme for continued vocational training and financed it on a yearly basis. They could also participate in programmes undertaken by the national government and by private companies. The State retained the prerogative for the legislative and regulatory framework. It also retained exceptional authority particularly for the action programmes which correspond to national priorities: in particular the fight against unemployment

of the young people who have left the school system without skills and without a job.

In terms of apprenticeships, the Regions were left entirely free to evaluate the needs and organise the means to meet them. Nevertheless, the State remained in

charge of defining the content of the courses taken by the apprentices and classroom inspection. The State retained the prerogative for the legislative and regulatory context and could provide additional funding to the Regions, for the development of this training track.

As far as the school system was concerned, the Law of 22 July 1983 instituted a system of shared responsibility between the State and local authorities for school-based training, where the State retained control over the management of the public service of teaching, while local authorities were given the responsibility for the construction, maintenance and physical operation of the buildings themselves². Moreover, this law entrusted the Regions with the responsibility for preparing a "Forward Planning For Training Programme" (schema prévisionnel des formations). The

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Vocational training and apprenticeship: regional spending increased by 36% between 1984 and 1990.
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Rectors was to use this document in defining his annual training programme. The Regional Councils and the General Councils prepared Forward Planning Investment Programmes" (programmes prévisionnels d'investissements) for the middle schools and high schools.

This set of legislation demonstrates the continuity of the idea that the Region is an appropriate level for planning and coherently integrating regional policy for growth and development and training policies.

Ten years of experience with decentralisation have provided paradoxical results. The Regions have indeed increased their financial involvement in the areas of vocational training and apprenticeship (regional spending increased by 36% between 1984 and 1990), yet, compared with the State, the Regions' share and responsibility has actually decreased. (It was 25% of all public spending - State + Regions - in 1984 and is only 14.7% in 1990).

Indeed, due to the pressure from unemployment, the State has strongly increased its intervention in the areas which remained national responsibility, in particular concerning training of young people looking for work. This increased intervention has taken place through deconcentrated action, using an entire system of local organisations and networks of technicians which covered the entire country. Thus, the State retained a preponderant role in the balance of the system, all the while developing its expertise and competence in educational engineering.

The initiative led by the Regions was primarily seen in their commitment to apprenticeship or continuing voca-

tional training. Some Regions put the emphasis on pre-qualifying training and first level qualification for persons with little training, while others emphasised higher level qualifying training. Depending on the situation in each Region, the regional initiatives promoted "either political attitudes seeking synergy or, on the contrary, autonomy relative to the State" (Remond, 1992).

In all, the actions led by the Regions were often only able to develop fully once they were recognised by the State and spread through national Programmes. The many experiments undertaken in co-operation with State services did, however, play a decisive role in the process of modernising the State's external and central services (Thoenig).

Paradoxically, the field of teaching and initial training, where the Regions' prerogatives were the most restricted, is where the regional actors' influence was the most strongly felt (Lichtenberger, 1993).

Indeed, the constraint of co-operation, which resulted from the system of shared authority between the State and the Regions, became a more powerful lever for change than the transfer of authority for apprenticeship and continuing vocational training. In the latter case, each authority acts autonomously, whereas the consensus system requires joint decisions concerning initial training, using the "Forward Planning Programmes" and involving the Regional Council, in charge of outfitting the schools, and the Academy Rectors, in charge of assigning teachers and teaching materials. This dialogue enables the participants to arrive at a consensus and to confront the pursued objectives.

The experience with the "Forward Planning For Training Programme" seems to show that their benefit especially lies in the new ways of "working together" among regional partners to reach a consensus, to confront the objectives being pursued

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by each partner so as to make them consistent. The key to a successful approach to the subject lies with the leadership capacity shown by the Regional Council in its role as the new policy" maker who must

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demonstrate his ability to co-ordinate the actions of the regional services, the State's deconcentrated services and professional organisations, while respecting the authority of each.

In reality, each Region had its own dynamic in the preparation of its joint education policy. However, all of them ran into the intrinsic limits of the legal scope of decentralisation : sharp segmentation of authority or-

2. Except for universities, which have not as yet been included in any decentralisation measures.

ganised around the segmentation of the target audiences (young students, young persons in apprenticeships, young persons in alternating training, young persons without skills, etc. ...); the continued strong separation between initial and continuing vocational training ; and lastly the difficulty in achieving partnerships with employers' associations which are primarily organised on the national level.

The diversity of the institutions and the participants intervening in a given Region - with each one acting on one segment of vocational training - gave rise to a great many consultative bodies, with no regulation among them. Thus, at the end of the first period of decentralisation, opinion was unanimous in denouncing not only the complexity of the system, but the difficulty in deciphering it for its potential beneficiaries: the young, the unemployed, the workers and the company heads.

1993: NEW TRANSFER AND INCREASED RESPONSIBILITIES FOR THE REGIONS

The recent Five-Year Law seems to have learned many lessons from the experience and limits of the preceding period. It reinforced regional powers by giving the Regions the responsibility for training actions for young people outside of the school system without any skills and without a job, and provided the financial means which corresponded to this transfer of responsibility. It rebalanced the relative weight of regional, as compared to State, intervention. Moreover, it enlarged the Regions' role as leader and co-ordinator by establishing a Regional Development Plan for Vocational Training for young people (PRDF) under regional responsibility. As opposed to the previous, forward planning exercise, this plan's intention is to cover the entire set of existing vocational training systems with a single approach.

This unification process brought about by the PRDF placed regional political power in the very centre of a dual network of relationships: on the one hand, the relations with the State's services in the Region (Rector and the Labour Ministry's services) and with the professional and interprofessional organisations which were represented on the regional level, and on the other hand, with all the actors on the local scene: companies, schools and training centres, local politicians. Thus, the Region should, in the long run, play an important role in the

area of policy for young people and restructuration of the supply side for initial and continuing vocational training. It should be able to facilitate the creation of itineraries for young people to accede to jobs and to skills, by synergising the diverse set of local educational resources. One of the most important issues at stake in the Five Year Law is that of changing the way public hand intervenes to link training activities and jobs. A training programme, in and of itself, does not create jobs. It only does so insofar as it is linked to recruitment procedures and to the types of work that it trains for. Here, the businesses and professional organisations are at fault. In France, companies reserve less than 15% of their recruitment for young people seeking their first jobs (compared with approximately 50% in the northern countries). This explains why the strong rate of youth unemployment in France is labour-market entry unemployment.

Will action on the regional and local levels enable the creation of courageous adjustments between the employer and the educational system ? Will it give rise to a more flexible relationship between educational reasoning and economic reasoning ?

By focusing exclusively on local management of adjustments between training and employment, is there not the danger of concentrating on the short-term alone and on immediate methods of action, to the detriment of defining and pursuing longer-term educational objectives ?

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