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THE CHOICE OF THE EMPLOYMENT AREA AS AN INTERVENTION TERRITORY IN THE FIELD OF THE PROFESSIONAL INSERTION

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Abstract: As far as the size is concerned, Alsace is a small region that includes two departments: the Haut-Rhin and the Bas-Rhin. During decades, it was considered as a wealth region which economical and employment results were always among the most performing of France. Nevertheless, the economic recession a struck this area and the economic and institutional actors had to make an inventory of a territory that is apparently very homogeneous but extremely diversified as concerning its ability to intervene on the local development as concerning the applicants for work's accompaniment. I will explain the step that allowed constituting a strong partnership around the concept of employment basin, as a relevant intervention zone.

AN ALARMING SITUATION

Alsace and its different employment zones, that are for example constituted by the Strasbourg, Mulhouse, Colmar basins, had been for a long time a region of relative economic prosperity where the unemployment level was always inferior to the national level of more or less two points.

This Alsatian specificity disappeared during the latest years, almost surreptitiously until the numbers shown that the unemployment rate was constantly increasing and was notably superior to the national average in 2005.

These difficulties, that were new in the region, can be partly explained by the frontier context and the demographical evolutions.

Indeed, the Alsatian firms are strongly linked to the German firms. However, the German economic context is not favourable. This situation has a double socio-economic consequence on the Strasbourg area, and more generally on the Alsatian one.

- The first element appears through the drop of the subcontracting and of the orders, and consequently through the employments number.
- The second element directly concerns the working population of Strasbourg employment area who work in Germany. The frontier workers number decreased of 1700 in two years.

The degradation of the unemployment situation can be explained by the residential attractivity of Strasbourg employment area. In the years 1990, this sector, as the whole Alsace, became again attractive, certainly because of the economic situation of the region at this moment.

The first results of the renovated census 2004 shown that this residential attractivity continues whereas the economic situation degrades. It could partly explain why the augmentation of the number of unemployed people is stronger than in other places.

These numbers shocked a lot as if no one noticed this evolution that was particularly unfavourable, firstly in comparison with the national average and even more in comparison with the agglomerations with a comparable size.

Some numbers to illustrate the situation:

- On the period 2000-2004, the unemployment increased of 72% in the region, 62% in the Bas-Rhin department and 58% in Strasbourg employment area. This augmentation is four times superior to the augmentation in Metropolitan France during the same period, whatever the kinds of unemployed people are concerned.
- In parallel, the evolution of the number of recipients of social minimum is very alarming (+45% of augmentation of the number of recipients of the insertion minimum income since 2000, whereas it was +18% in Metropolitan France).

The situation of Strasbourg employment zone is unfavourable in almost three activity sectors over four; when the situation is favourable at the national level, it is less in Strasbourg (it is for example the case for the services to the firms (+70% of employment between 1993 and 2003 whereas it was +54% in Strasbourg); when it is unfavourable at the national level, it is still more Strasbourg. It is the example of the industries of equipment goods (-13% in Strasbourg and -3,6% at the national level).

The paradox

Nevertheless, the firms have difficulties to find people for the jobs that are available in some sectors. Conventions are already implemented, especially in catering, so as to import working force from other Countries of the Union. Consequently we are in a paradox phase when unemployment and the number of recipients of social minima increase at the same time as the number of non provided stations in some firms which are obliged to appeal the working force of other countries.

The project of House of employment project, as a federator intervention tool

The programming law for social cohesion of January 2005 planned ten programmes to take up the challenge of unemployment in France

The first one of these programmes is entitled “Federate the initiatives for a new contract with the applicants for work”.

In this framework, the Houses of employment had to constitute one of the tools that federate the public and private initiatives in favour of employment on a territory which borders were not defined in the law text.

The urban community of Strasbourg that gathers 28 communes (550 000 inhabitants), used this tool to start an important action that allows implementing an operational programme which takes into account the weaknesses and forces.

Indeed, if the economic context is less favourable, Alsace has assets: its demography, its geographic situation and its infrastructures, its public research and its industrial grid (*competitiveness poles, ability to innovate...*).

The stakes for the employment market

They are especially:

- Increasing the employment number
- Accompanying the economic evolutions (*reclassifications, reconversion, development of new competences*)
- Better answering the employment offers (*professional orientation*)
- Remediating the degradation of the young people professional insertion
- Increasing the qualification level

Strasbourg Urban community solicited the Department, Region, Consular houses and State services elected members so as to define the limits of the most relevant territory to start a broad action.

Region seemed interesting because of its competences in the economic planning and training/qualification fields. But it was necessary to mobilize two General councils, among which the Haut-Rhin with has problems that are different from the ones of the Strasbourg area (urban area/industrial sector that is linked to automobile)

Department was involved in its activity field, local development and insertion, but the so-called CUS (Strasbourg Urban Community) though the territory was too diversified, as it integrated a semi-rural and rural zone which concerns are very different from the ones of the urban site of Strasbourg..

The CUS made a general and shared diagnosis with all its partners firstly on Alsace that is the subject I have just developed. Then, it made some “zooms” on situations that seemed specific.

Beyond the fundamental axis in the fields of economic development or firms maintenance, structuring investments, the life basins were taken into account.

By integrating the inhabitants’ displacements from their living place to their working place, firms delocalisation; within Strasbourg city, in its close surroundings or abroad.

The communes have a fundamental responsibility of social cohesion on their territory.

The regrouping of the 101 communes of the employment basin, beyond the Urban Community of Strasbourg, appeared to be the most relevant to lead an intervention project in the professional insertion field of the House of Employment.

Consequently, the regional or departmental dimensions partly lose their meaning, because they do not return account of the specificity of the people who live in the blocks and cities.

Lastly because the unemployed people and the social minimum recipients are concentrated in the big cities, as in Strasbourg (in the Bas-Rhin, the city of Strasbourg concentrates the two thirds of the RMI –insertion minimum income-, that is to say 11 000 households and 20 000 people).

And in the heart of the city, some blocks concentrate an important part of the RMI recipients, especially in the so-called “ZUS” blocks (sensitive urban zones) or in the parking spaces for former travellers.

When we try to go beyond this point and we study the social minimum recipients' needs and the unemployed people ones in terms of social and professional insertion, the macro approach seems still more shifted

The brakes to the activity renewal are so important that the approach should be very detailed and should particularly (take into account element like:

- **mobility** – it means non only using the major roads, but without driving licence and car we should make sure that there are some public transports, the vacancy of working stations in sectors in tension, such as hotel trade-caring, construction, services are the ones which imply space displacements and unusual schedules.
- **qualification** – it is indispensable to reach being recruited or sometimes kept. Adapting the qualification to the different public is difficult for example when they are refugees (with skills and diploma, but without being able to speak French) or young people who have lost contact with the school system.

These two examples, mobility and qualification, can seem simple to implement, event on broad space like a region or a group of regions.

Nevertheless, we should not forget that the decentralization laws of the 1980's and then of the three latest years changed the competences. Besides, the regional, departmental assemblies and the municipal councils decide the political orientations they want to give to their community in all legitimacy.

Thus, the Alsace region decided to give the priority to the qualifying training, so as to adapt as much as possible the applicants for work and the employees to the technical and economic requirements of the firms. Moreover, it is what the firms claim.

This political choice is relevant, but does not allow solving the situations of people who are very far from the employment world and who need pre-qualifications phases or training phases to learn the basic knowledge (French language, or know-how)

In the same way, each general council which is in charge of the RMI recipients' insertion considers that it is a heavy activity. The Bas-Rhin general council directed its funding towards the RMI public who is able to directly accede to an employment and left the social sector dealing with the other situations.

The State institutions and services have a national logic: the ANPE is in charge of the follow-up of the applicants for work who have a strong ability to occupy a job. The furthest away from employment publics are directed towards the insertion local plans. We should also notice that less than the half of the people who are dealt with by the receptions for young people and adults except in the ANPE are inscribed as applicants for work.

As we conceived the House of employment programme, it had to take into account the following essential elements:

- The region takes deals with the qualifying professional training
- The department deals with the direct access to the employment of the RMI recipients
- The ANPE (National Agency for Employment) deals with the applicants for work's placing and follow-up (inscribed people)

Consequently, two hypotheses were possible:

- ◆ the regional level was chosen as an intervention territory and policy, and all the people who were not able to directly get a qualifying formation were rejected
- ◆ the more precise level of employment basin (101 communes/550 000 inhabitants) was chosen, so as to guarantee the construction of insertion itineraries that take into account the persons and the economic context of the firms which need working force.

As a consequence, the choice was to invest the interstices that were left by the regional or national policies and, so as to complete the territorial and State communities work, we directed the project of House of employment towards **social inclusion and preparation to employment.**

As a **conclusion**, I wanted to draw the attention on the convergence of the global and local visions, insofar as they coexist and articulate in a relevant way.

Obviously, at the European level, we should reduce the gaps between the countries and the regions and reinforce the economic and social cohesion between these regions, by supporting those which have the most difficulties.

In each region, it is necessary to privilege the big projects that are structuring (for example transports, heavy investments) to guarantee an efficient organization and an economic development.

Nevertheless, it is indispensable to make sure that these investments do not only benefit to the most integrated people, what could organize the most fragile people exclusion.

Maintaining the social cohesion in each communes and block implies a tuned and adapted approach of the people and local firms needs.

But this very local approach is useful insofar as it is inscribed in more global contracts, in our case the planning contact between the State and the region, the city contract which is presently renovating and the policy of the European Social Fund (ESF).

Thus, each intervention level corresponds to a territory