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Solving the Crisis. VET as an Economic Policy (France, from the Long Depression to the Second Oil Crisis)

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Vocational Education and Training in Europe: Cases, Concepts and Challenges.
Esther Berner & Philipp Gonon (eds.)

Preprint Paper

Summary: In modern France, economic crises have presented an opportunity for administrations to intervene directly in economic and social affairs. On these occasions, the vocational education and training system was used as a policy instrument to address the difficulties of the time, i.e. the necessity to revive the French industry during the Long Depression, the will to direct the workforce toward disadvantaged professional sectors during the crisis of 1930s, and the requirement to facilitate the professional integration of youth into the labour market during the Oil Crises of the 1970s. This paper is thus concerned with the diversion of vocational training practices for the benefit of these issues, both at legislative and regulatory levels, as well as in a local context, provided by the industrial district of Saint-Étienne.

Keywords: public policies, local authorities, economic crisis, employment

Highlighted through the works of Gary Becker (Becker 1993), the concept of human capital has turned the issue of education into one of the most relevant means for socioeconomic prosperity. Robert Lucas used human capital by applying it, not to individual career paths, but rather to states (Lucas 1988). He modelled its influence on workers' productivity, and as such on the economic growth of countries. However, neoclassical stances are particularly limited in their analysis of social phenomena, and do not reflect the whole complexity of human rationality. They fail to explain how the different categories of collective actors involved in these processes are able to negotiate and create educational paths. Historical institutionalism, on the other hand, is more likely able to present those relationships (Thelen 2004).

Education is not only considered to be a way of fostering economic development, at individual and territorial levels. Its promotion also occurs during harsher times like economic crises. Since 2008 and the so-called Great Recession, investment in education looks more than ever looks likely to be one of its key remedies. The OECD in particular promotes the efficiency of such a solution (OECD 2010). Literature written on this specific subject exists, both for education in general (Heyneman 1990; Ewing/Hicks 2006) and more specifically on vocational education and training (VET)

(Koudahl 2010). But however, these studies relate mainly to Anglo-Saxon countries, while the French case, for instance, has not been addressed in this regard.

Contrary to the British workplace-based training and the corporatist German dual model (Greinert 2005), the French VET system is characterized, by state intervention. From the liberal *Second Empire* to the post-1945 welfare state (Kuisel 1981; Rosanvallon 1990), and from the *dirigiste* economic-planning to the *État brancardier* (stretcher-bearer state) (Cohen 1989), the VET network developed along two interactive ways: first, through the establishment of a regulatory framework by the public authorities (Chapoulie 2010) and second, through certain local initiatives, more or less efficient, depending upon the financial support of administrations (Bodé/Savoie 1995). Both aspects responded, according to the level of political intervention in economic matters.

When considered as a historical process, the relation between VET and economic policy raises the following questions. Firstly, when did the use of VET as an economic intervention device begin? Secondly, who amongst administrations, local authorities and employers is the main actor behind these VET changes? The consequences in the education/training debate arise from this leadership. And thirdly, what is the sustainability of such organizational changes? In response to these questions this paper will consider three major economic downturns since the late 19th Century: the Long Depression, the Great Depression and the Oil Crises. It will consider the education/training debate. The diverse range of public receiving training must also be taken into account. To explain the challenge that crisis situations present for VET policies, questioning the local/national relations, particularly between the national and local ones, proves helpful. Therefore, the national chronology will be compared with examples drawn from a case study devoted to the organization of VET in an industrial region: the industrial district of Saint-Étienne, in the Loire department.

The Long Depression (1873–1885): industrial concerns rather than economic competition

Debated on its status and named after a disputed expression, the Long Depression was actually more of a slowdown in economic growth rather than a real depression. Prices dropped globally, which led to a decrease in economic activity with this being particularly acute in the French situation. While the decline was only relevant when compared to foreign competition, it therefore became especially important when comparing with Germany (Asselain 1984). Owing to market, agricultural and demographic factors, the Long Depression revealed the diminishing effects of the First Industrialization and its main activities, mainly in textiles and metals. The progressive mechanization of industrial production continued and the ever greater need for scientific and technical knowledge affected labour organization. In the meantime, increased competition in international trade raised a significant economic problem that the political field would have to solve.

The debate surrounding vocational education and the "crise de l'apprentissage"

The first part of the Third Republic was challenging. From the downfall of the Emperor Napoléon III in early September 1870, to the stabilization of the Republican government in 1877, any want for institutional reform faced significant resistance.

Once the situation was resolved, the legislative work began. For example, the Ferry laws (1881–1882) imposed mandatory, secular and free primary education, though this was not the sole example. Vocational education, a major oversight of the schooling system reforms during the 19th Century, was finally enacted through its founding text. The 11th December 1880 Act implemented the *écoles manuelles d'apprentissage* (Brucy 1998; Chapoulie 2010). They came under the control of the Ministry of Trade and Industry, though the status mainly applied to other existing schools, attached to the Ministry of Public Instruction, known as the *écoles primaires supérieures* (upper primary schools). Established by the Guizot law of 1833, then theoretically abolished in 1850, these schools experienced a new dynamism following the Ministerial *Circulaire* of 16th May 1878 (Briand/Chapoulie 2012). This double administrative tutelage slowed the development of vocational schools for ten years.

The text of the law did not offer up any economic justification for its inception (Charmasson/Le Lorrain/Ripa 1987). However, it could only be understood through the growing debate surrounding the *crise de l'apprentissage* (apprenticeship crisis) (Chapoulie 2010; Lembré 2013). The economic downturn and German rivalry were therefore particularly serious. The instruction of vocational training was discussed at the *Congrès international du commerce et de l'industrie*, organized alongside the World Exposition of Paris in 1878. Defenders of the apprenticeship renovation argued against those partisan to the development of vocational schools. While the debate was partly solved with the 1919 Astier Law (Brucy/Troger 2000), in both cases, crisis awareness was not the main motivation for these positions. Know-how, skills and social relations within workshops, especially for men, mattered more. The crisis situation does not fully explain the occurrence of institutional change, however certain elements of it do (technological and organisational evolutions, quest for competitiveness).

From the legislative framework to local initiatives

While Gérard Bodé characterizes the 1815–1880 period as the time of local initiatives, the next one cannot yet be regarded as marked by systematic state intervention (Bodé 2006). Municipalities had to finance the opening of vocational schools. Some localities had already established such institutions, such as in Paris and Le Havre, while others took advantage of employers' initiatives, namely in Lyon and Mulhouse. In Saint-Étienne, an attempt in 1865 to install vocational courses for apprentices, the *Société d'enseignement professionnel de la Loire*, was patterned after the Lyon model, though it collapsed in 1872 due to lack of municipal support and failing in the employers' philanthropy. The 1870s continued to experience demand for the technical training of future workers, concerning almost exclusively men. The city of Saint-Étienne demanded in 1879 for the establishment of an *école d'arts et métiers*. A subscription was put into place, which involved the major municipalities in the department and the chamber of commerce[1]. Despite these efforts, competition was tough and the administration eventually chose to locate the school in Lille.

This setback did not stop local aspirations, and in the same year, the radical-socialist municipality of Saint-Chamond, an industrial and medium-sized city close to

[1] Departmental Archives of the Loire (ADL), 9 M 123: subscription for the establishment of an *école d'arts et métiers* in Saint-Étienne, [1879].

Saint-Étienne, opened an *école primaire supérieure*[2]. It was intended to be as a vocational school, which would prepare candidates for the anticipated arrival of the *école d'arts et metiers*. While its first years were middling, the formula quickly became so convincing that Saint-Étienne recruited the school director to create its own school in 1882[3]. In following, the socialist municipality simply dismissed the Brothers of the Christian Schools from its *école primaire supérieure* for boys, and as a response, local Catholic employers supported the opening of a new school run by the brothers. Its purpose was to train highly-skilled workers who would then go on to become "excellent Christian foremen[4]".

The opening of these schools occurred while the creation of such institutions was on the policy agenda. Skills and industrial activity were its main motivation, however it was the notion of economic competition that applied to another school. As it was directly related to traditional activities like the ribbon and weapon industries, the Municipal drawing school greatly interested the city council. A 28th June 1880 debate outlined its economic challenges[5]. Foreign competition was characterized not only by a cheaper workforce, but also by the "good taste and art" of the contending cities, illustrating the "state of suffering" of Saint-Étienne's industries. Local activities were able to maintain their superiority "provided that, from generation to generation, worship and science of this good taste and that art are profusely extended to the working class". The fear of foreign competition motivated the reorganization of the school in 1884, which was run by both the city and the *Beaux-Arts* administration. Resembling a series of evening classes more than an actual day school, the new *école régionale des arts industriels* (regional school of industrial arts) brought together many already existing vocational courses, with a number of them taking place at the *école primaire supérieure*[6].

Ultimately, while the economic situation partly explained the creation of schools, the Long Depression was not considered by the actors to be a decisive criterion. This argument was implicit, perhaps because the issue of unemployment had not yet been construed as a category of public policy, contrary to during the 1930s (Salais/Baverez/Reynaud 1986; Topalov 1994). The acknowledged value of vocational schools, as well as the constant support of municipalities and administrations helped to stabilize them during the crisis and beyond. Indeed, these schools would once again become relevant during the 1930s crisis.

The Great Depression (1929–1939): training for employers' needs

The Wall Street Crash of 1929 was not immediately reflected in the French economy. However from 1931, the inadequacies of the production system come to light (Caron 1999). Moreover, despite its late entry into the crisis, when compared to its main competitors, France's recovery also occurred late. The French governments were primarily obsessed with monetary stability, as there was no real economic policy

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[2] Municipal Archives of Saint-Chamond, 1 Dsc 15: register of Municipal Council debates, 1877–1879.

[3] Municipal Archives of Saint-Étienne (AMSE), 9 C2 2: Municipal Council debate from 17th July 1882.

[4] Lasallian Archives (Lyon), archival fonds from the École Sainte-Barbe: Saint-Étienne *École professionnelle*, *sommaire des événements* 1882–1886, s.d.

[5] AMSE, 1 D 61: Municipal Council debate from 28th October 1880, report from the Deputy Mayor Montegu on the reorganization of the drawing school.

[6] ADL, T 2092: report from the director of the *École régionale des arts industriels* to the Prefect of the Loire department, May 1921.

before 1935. The fight against unemployment was also slowed by serious difficulties, related to the inefficiency of the recording of jobless workers and inadequacies between the creation of certain categories and the actual situations (Salais/Baverez/Reynaud 1986). The effects of the economic slowdown were initially diminished by the limitation of the foreign workforce and the return of dismissed workers to rural areas. The deepening crisis mainly affected unskilled and semi-skilled workers. As a result, administrations were concerned about apprenticeship, which they tried to highlight anew. However, this was not the most innovative aspect of the period. With the spread of scientific management (Moutet 1997), the skills required in larger metalworking firms evolved and yet another training pathway developed during the 1930s: the retraining of unemployed workers.

From mass unemployment...

The Great Depression was the first large-scale opportunity in which a *traitement social du travail* (literally social treatment of unemployment) could be applied, as Keynesian views on public spending in the economic field developed (Desrosières 2014). For their part, employers' organizations, such as the *Union des industries métallurgiques et minières* (UIMM – Metalworking and Mining Industries Union) considered the treatment of unemployment to be a major issue linked to the regulation of the labour market (Fraboulet 2007). The problems were so important that the employers' delegates at the Work Placement Administrative Commission of the Loire department suggested, during the 24th February 1931 meeting, that unemployed people should use their spare time to acquire professional knowledge that would help them find new jobs[7]. This recommendation primarily targeted young workers aged between 18 and 35 years, who were considered to be less affected by routine and bad habits. The envisioned training courses should also be optional. However the burden of supporting such an organization and the problem of providing unemployment benefits during training prevented any realization. Public vocational schools still kept jobless youth busy over the age requirement for compulsory courses[8].

Subsequently, the legislative work began. A 15th October 1932 Ministerial *Circulaire* provided measures for the adaptation of unskilled workers in vocational schools (Bodé 2002). Another *Circulaire* from the 14th January 1933 imposed that unemployed youth, who were recipients of municipal funds, must follow vocational courses. However, school principals were reluctant to connect their students with workers of questionable morality[9]. Furthermore, there was a lack of workforce-poor industries therefore unemployed people would have to be oriented towards professions with high levels of foreign labour. In a letter to the Prefect of the Loire department written on the 6th December 1932, the President of the Chamber of

[7] ADL, 10 M 195: meeting of the Work Placement Administrative Commission of the Loire department, 24th February 1931.

[8] ADL, 123 W 29: letter from the Director of the *École pratique d'industrie de garçons* in Rive-de-Gier (Municipal school of industrial practice for boys) to the Prefect of the Loire department, 14th February 1932; letter from the Directress of the *École pratique de commerce et d'industrie de jeunes filles* in Firminy (Municipal school of trade and industry practice for girls) to the Prefect of the Loire department, 23rd February 1932.

[9] ADL, 123 W 29: meeting of the Loire Commission on the retraining of unemployed workers within vocational education schools, 20th January 1933.

Commerce in Saint-Étienne questioned the effectiveness of such a policy[10]. He was particularly sceptical regarding the interest of unemployed workers in attending the vocational schools and mandatory courses.

Despite such reluctance, the formula became more definite. A *Circulaire* dated the 29th November 1934 specified the intervention methods for Vocational Education administration in the training of unemployed workers. The decrees of the 30th and 31st October 1935 involved the Ministry of Labour in the approval of retraining centres, which at the time were more focused on training than education per se. The UIMM participated directly in this regulatory work (Bonnet 1999; Fraboulet 2007). In the Saint-Étienne region, employers initially required the lack of any constraint on the placement of workforce. In April 1936 the Departmental Labour commission responded to a survey by the Ministry of Labour[11]. It believed that unemployed youth should be oriented towards new occupations, without encouraging the establishment of dedicated retraining centres. Existing vocational schools and apprenticeships should be privileged. The *Front populaire*'s ministry, which governed from May 1936 to April 1938, did little to change the process. A census of unemployed people was initiated through the application of a 26th September 1937 decree. The aim was focused as much on placing the skilled workforce as retraining the unskilled one. Joint Committees were implemented at the local level and mobilized vocational education staff, which included employers and workers completing inspection duties. These commissions were intended to assess professional skills of jobless persons before directing them to placements[12].

... to mass production

The situation then evolved quickly with the economic crisis making room for the arms race. Due to a lack of skilled labour, war industries necessitated the implementation of accelerated training. The 12th November 1938 *décret-loi* (decree-act) increased the funding for retraining centres set up by private initiatives. The first centres, created as early as 1935 at the instigation of metalworking employers' organizations such as the UIMM, connected to labour in the Paris region, even though they were located outside (Fraboulet 2007). While such a centre was recognized as being valuable for the metalworking industry in the Saint-Étienne region in June 1938[13], its implementation was not achieved until the end of 1939 due to a lack of available premises[14]. The local employers therefore favoured private or firms' vocational schools.

Despite the Battle of France in June 1940, the training path introduced during the 1930s crisis remained. The former accelerated training centres hosted unemployed youth from the summer of 1940 and after the war, they became *centres d'apprentissage* (apprenticeship centres, now *lycées professionnels*). The

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[10] ADL, 123 W 29: letter from the President of the Chamber of commerce of Saint-Étienne to the Prefect of the Loire department, 6th December 1932.

[11] ADL, 10 M 47: meeting of the Loire Departmental Labour Commission, 2nd April 1936.

[12] ADL, 10 M 127: file on the qualitative census of unemployment, 1938. The lack of data on the operation must also be noted. For further information, report to: Departmental Archives of the Rhône, 1 T 2337: retraining and outplacement of unemployed workers, 1937–1939.

[13] Académie François Bourdon, UIMM Archives, 0012 Z 1136–01: supplementary report for the meeting of the Placement Committee of the Ministry of Labour, 27th June 1938.

[14] ADL, 123 W 29: correspondence from the Saint-Étienne labour inspector, 1939–1940.

institutionalization of skilled workers training marked the finest hours of the *parenthèse scolaire* (schooling parenthesis) (Brucy/Troger 2000). For its part, adult accelerated training grew in significance from 1944 as it had to provide the skilled workforce needed to rebuild the country and the national economy. Even though many companies or employers' associations' centres closed thereafter, the establishment of worker advancement practices opened the way for the development of Training Within Industry, in large firms or dedicated agencies. The Great Depression offered an opportunity to extend the practice of training to new audiences, and this pattern was once again seen at work during the Oil Crises.

The Oil Crises (1973–1982): the dual training cure

The First Oil Crisis in 1973 ended what the French economist Jean Fourastié called the *Trente Glorieuses* (the Glorious Thirty, roughly from 1945 to 1975). Much like during the Great Depression, France experienced a slower start in its shift to the crisis (Boyer 1998). Economic problems did not stop at the simple matter of oil prices. Dependence on state intervention in certain sectors, a lack of support for innovative industries like capital goods, the decline of public procurement and the low competitiveness of French products in export as well as on the domestic market were all major factors used to explain the severity of the situation. Despite its size, the crisis was initially experienced as a classic cyclical economic crash (Caron 1999). After the difficulties of 1974–1975, the economy temporarily resumed until the second oil shock in 1979. Meanwhile, technological advances, the globalization of trade and the slowdown of traditional industries in Western countries caused a real downturn in the productivity of capital and labour. The crisis of the Fordist model then forced the reconsideration of both employment opportunities and the skills required by firms, which tended to disappear in favour of competencies. This change accompanied that of work organization and processes (Stroobants 1993), in part motivated by the willingness of companies to control professional certification (Zarifian 2004).

Integrating unemployed youth into the labour market

The impact of economic difficulties primarily affected the most vulnerable groups, namely the foreign workforce, women, older workers and young people, especially those who were unskilled. Despite compulsory education being extended to the age of 16 in 1967, youth access to the labour market was blocked. At the same time, diplomas were seemingly becoming increasingly disconnected from job openings. These factors became the base for the concept of *insertion professionnelle* (professional integration) (Nicole-Drancourt/Roulleau-Berger 2006). This concept allowed treating a specific statistical category that, apart from qualifications and recognized skills, was relatively undifferentiated in its characteristics. In the wake of work conducted by the *Commissariat général au Plan* commissions, public policies now had to deal with flows of people in order to get them into employment (Tanguy 1986). Vocational integration could only be effective if trained workers were adaptable and suitable to labour market needs. Therefore, employability became a key concept.

The VET reforms, especially the 16th July 1971 laws on apprenticeship and continuous training, dramatically changed the educational landscape. Vocational training now benefited from regular funding from administrations (Chapoulie 2010). At the same time, the administrative machinery of education was reformed. The 1971

acts endorsed administrative regionalization of VET (Terrot 1997). A major production of statistics on education was needed for planning, and was conducted through organizations like Céreq (*Centre d'études et de recherches sur les qualifications*). Through these studies, public authorities began to realize the disparities between skilled and unskilled youth facing unemployment. From 1974, professional integration thus becomes a national issue, inseparable from VET.

Public policies henceforth sought to establish a match between VET and employment, called *adéquation formation-emploi* (Tanguy 1986; Giret/Lopez/Rose 2005; Chapoulie 2010). However the real challenges were found on the margins of the school system. The pressing problem of youth leaving school without a degree or a qualification was now on the policy agenda. A 5th July 1977 law instituted the first *Pacte national pour l'emploi des jeunes* (National pact for youth employment). Throughout the length of the crisis, a total of five campaigns occurred from 1977 to 1982. They were perceived as a way of encouraging employers, especially smaller ones, to recruit (Charlot/Figeat 1985). The main actions organized through the *Pactes* were: social welfare tax exemptions on apprenticeship and youth recruiting, internships, *contrats emploi-formation* (contracts involving both employment and at-work vocational training, especially for unskilled youth and women) and dual training. Some of these actions already existed before 1977, though the initiative was also a way of communicating the struggle for employment. While the first *Pacte* was a clear success thanks to the participation of employers, the results of the following campaigns were somewhat mixed. Placement rates tended to gradually decrease (Gaspard/Frank 1981) with financial conditions and length of training also worsening with each new *Pacte*. Various support measures were also viewed as falling victim to the deadweight effect (Charlot/Figeat 1985).

Pactes thus appeared increasingly ineffective to employers and lost some of their legitimacy. The final one (1981–1982), launched after the socialist victory in the presidential elections of 1981, even changed its name to *Plan Avenir Jeunes* (Youth future plan) before succumbing to a major overhaul. The system is nevertheless retained. Bertrand Schwartz, special adviser to the Prime Minister, later introduced a social dimension to professional integration (Schwartz 1981). Educational aspects once again mattered with youth employability leaving the single statistical approach and instead focusing on individual pathways (Quenson 2012). However the highlighting of dual training through the *Pactes* – which also occurred within vocational schools – put an end to the *parenthèse scolaire*. Therefore dual training became the new benchmark for VET policies (Dubar 2004).

Top-down policy and local VET system

The previously mentioned administrative regionalization did not present local actors with further more decision-making powers. Rather, from a rational regional planning perspective, it appeared to be more like technocratic devolvement than true decentralization (Pasquier 2012). For VET, the dual purpose of regionalization was to enable the coordination of policies with new levels of consultation that were more in tune with the evolution of the modes of representation of professional organizations (Terrot 1997). Local VET bodies could only provide dual training courses adapted to the needs of employers, whether public or agreed by a Ministry – National Education or Labour and Social Affairs. Departmental observation groups (GOD), comprised of only administrations representatives, selected between the proposals, which were then forwarded to the regional level, where the distribution of allocated funds would

be decided[15]. Multiple criteria were used, from the employment situation of each department to the estimated value of the various training supplies. Internships were approved by the regional Prefect, and candidates were recruited through local agencies of the *Agence nationale pour l'emploi* (National employment agency). The role of employers in this decision-making was weak. They could dialog or participate in existing training institutions, directly organize vocational training for the largest ones like Creusot-Loire, or create bodies linked to local trade associations and chambers.

In general, training institutions cooperated in the development of a local VET supply adapted to job opportunities. Following on from the second *Pacte*, administrations encouraged the implementation of *SAS d'orientation* (literally Guidance airlock)[16]. It introduced a general testing period for all trainees in order to improve their placement and to share costs. While some form of competition between training providers may have remained, public actors such as universities and GRETA (*groupements d'établissements*, schools groups dedicated to further education) coexisted alongside to private organizations, that were closer to professionals, in order to share the burden. In Saint-Étienne's case, one institution was symptomatic of the relationship between public policy and private actors.

The *Centre interprofessionnel de promotion de la Loire* (CIPL) was a joint training organization composed of employers, trade unionists, administrations' and local authorities' representatives. Its actions appeared similar to the experience of the Nancy-based CUCES (*Centre universitaire de cooperation économique et sociale*) (Laot 1999). The CIPL organized many courses for *promotion sociale* (upward mobility based on lifelong learning) to the benefit of regional skills and competencies development (Vernet 2013). Its actions were funded by government subsidies and a specific taxation on employers. A reduction in economic activities however reduced available funds and, following the systematization of training courses agreement, drove the CIPL to become merely an extension of public actors[17]. From a resource for local economic development during the 1960s, it became a remedy for vocational integration. Meanwhile, administrations using local VET actors for labour purposes were inclined to favour the initiatives of employers' trade associations and as a result, corporatist interests prevailed over the common good.

As it relied on the employment possibilities within firms, the dual training formula became problematic when job opportunities decreased due to factory closures and economic downfall. Vocational integration could not help all young job seekers and such a policy could not replace a comprehensive reform of initial vocational education. The 1980s thus experienced major reforms, such as the creation of the *baccalauréat professionnel* in 1985 and the extension of apprenticeships to *baccalauréat* and higher education levels in 1987.

This study has allowed us to consider two types of crisis: with or without mass unemployment, since technological and organizational changes permanently remain. VET was used in many different ways to assist economic recovery, such as

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[15] ADL, 1192 W 50–56: files from the *Pactes nationaux pour l'emploi des jeunes*' enforcement in the Loire department, 1977–1982.

[16] ADL, 1192 W 53: CIPL, *Action intégrée 50 jeunes*, 21st June 1979.

[17] ADL, 1192 W 50: CIPL, *Note sur les conséquences financières prévisibles entrainées par la mise en place de la loi du 5 juillet 1977*, 22nd July 1977.

improving workers' skills, adapting to industrial needs and integrating into the labour market. These initiatives generally survived the experience of the crisis and proved their sustainability, sometimes at the expense of further adjustments. The Long Depression necessitated the opening of vocational schools. The Great Depression required the commitment of employers for retraining. The Oil Crises demanded an adaptation of the training supply. In each of these cases, the means required the coordination of national policies with local resources. The changing nature of the local actors involved should also be noted: municipalities and employers; employers and devolved administrations; devolved administrations and VET institutions. Local practices had a tendency to precede legislative and regulatory changes and the creation of new VET streams used these local initiatives. These crises acted as critical junctures and revealed the need for new pathways, even if they difficultly came *ex nihilo* and were more readily related to employment policies than economic ones. Unemployment created this confusion, as employability does not mean employment. The small number of people thus trained also limited the effects of VET as an emergency fix. The paths opened by these institutional changes were later used to improve the availability of skills and competencies to the labour market. Therefore in the current French context it is somewhat confusing that the government continues trying to emphasize apprenticeship, despite the economic situation being disadvantageous to its extension.

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