

Decentralising vocational training: More than just a shift in scale. Lessons drawn from the French experience

Since 1983 France has engaged in a slow process of decentralisation of vocational training. A significant stage was reached in 1994 when the regions were tasked with the responsibility of “ensuring coherence in the supply of vocational training”. Ten years later, a new stage has further extended the powers of regional councils. This article proposes a reflection on the notion and meaning of this decentralisation process.

The change in scale (from the State to the Region) in the conduct of vocational training policies and the devolution of powers to a new actor (from central government to the elected regional authority, the Regional Council) are often interpreted as a transfer aiming to improve the governance of the system or, in a more economic sense, to improve the coordination between actors and therefore the efficiency and effectiveness of the system. The change in scale is seen as expressing the limitations of a state management of vocational training (in the sense of Commaille, Jobert, 1998). This is why, in France, it is combined with forms of neo-corporatism in which social partners, within occupational branches, play an important role (Giraud, Meriaux, 2003). But this change in scale might only be a shift, reproducing the main characteristics of the system at regional level. In this case, it would only represent a minor institutional innovation dependent on these great societal characteristics (state management combined with neo corporatism).

The adopted mode of decentralisation and the fact that the transfer of powers to the regional authorities has been limited and in continuity with the traditional French mode of regulation of the vocational training system, would tend to validate this hypothesis (section 1).

However, decentralisation represents a break from the traditional modes of definition and implementation of education policies and a shift in the boundaries of public action (section 2).

These changes also concern the systems of actors: decentralising implies that relevant systems of actors exist or are developed at regional level (section 3). This question emerges in most cases of decentralisation (see how the West German model was imposed on the Lander in former East Germany for example, Giraud and Meriaux, 2003). The slow emergence of a new system of actors, significantly different from the one that exists at national level, can contribute to a more radical innovation.

Finally (section 4), decentralisation, in an “administered” mode of regulation, calls for the development of new knowledge and public action tools.

1 A decentralisation process dependent on societal characteristics

Many European countries have chosen to decentralise their vocational training policies. However, there are significant differences between countries as to the nature of the powers transferred to the local systems of actors and as to the level at which these actors operate. The choices made by each country reflect the specificity in which these local systems of actors are developed and combine with central government: autonomous regions in Spain, Lander in Germany, regional councils in France. They also reflect the status and the mode of regulation of vocational training adopted in each country: a dominant apprenticeship training system and a strong and attractive vocational training system in Germany (Giraud, Meriaux, 2003); a vocational training system dominated by traditional academic education and essentially in the form of full-time school training, in France; an almost non-existent, but developing vocational training system in Spain.

1.1 Choosing to decentralise vocational training

France has engaged in this process by gradually entrusting certain aspects of vocational training to the regional authorities (see box number 1). The arguments of public policy that are the most often used to justify decentralisation are those related to the growing efficiency and effectiveness of proximity governance (Gerard Varet, 1995). Proximity governance is supposed to better take into account the demands of families and young people and makes it possible to better adjust the supply of training to the needs of enterprises.

Decentralisation reflects the gradual obsolescence of the different systems of public regulation of vocational training. In the 1970s, initial vocational training was for the most part governed by the state. The objective was to quantitatively and qualitatively monitor and control vocational training. From the quantitative point of view, this control consisted in adjusting the flows of students according to the needs of the labour market. Qualitatively, the curricula and national diplomas were designed and adjusted to the nation's demand for skills. This planification policy has been the object of much discussion and scientific criticism (Méhaut, 2001) particularly as the instruments of public policy supposed to help implement it proved inefficient. Thus the industrial advisory committees comprised of trade union and employer representatives and the State Administration were often the place where ideological debates took place but few concrete proposals were actually made (Fourcade, Ourliac, Ourtau, 1992). The Administration and the teachers most often controlled the qualitative aspect of the supply. As for the quantitative dimension, no provisional model made it possible to assess the needs sufficiently precisely. Furthermore, the 1970s were marked by the expansion of education (general education essentially) and the orientation of the students was essentially determined by an academic and meritocratic logic (Verdier, 2001). The 1980s marked the progressive weakening of this model, particularly as a result of increasing unemployment among young people. New instruments of public intervention (training courses for young unemployed workers, development of work-linked training) were developed. The idea of a decentralised implementation emerged with the possibility of proximity management of training for unemployed youth. In the 1990s this trend was

accentuated. From the qualitative point of view (content of the diplomas and training courses), the national joint committees regained importance, but in a wider approach: their task was to identify large target occupational areas (and the associated skills) while anticipating the needs for skills related to future mobilities. The scope of knowledge that the students must acquire is no longer strictly limited to the skills required for a given occupation. But the pre-eminence of national diplomas has been reinforced. In terms of flow management, the deconcentration/ decentralisation process was strengthened but with an administered mode of regulation “à la française” (Bel, 2003).

1.2 The maintenance of an administered mode regulation of proximity

The most significant progress in terms of decentralisation was made in the field of vocational training. And one can suppose that this is not only due to the fact that vocational training is explicitly related to employment and the labour market, but also to the fact that it represents a “dominated” segment of the education and training system. Gradually, the powers transferred to the regions have theoretically given them a central role in the governance of the system. But the nature of these transfers and of the modes of intervention, maintains a degree of continuity with the characteristics of the traditional national system.

The regions have gained more power in the field of vocational training for young people, firstly in the field of further training for unemployed youth (progressive transfer of financing, action on the supply of training), apprenticeship (they have authority in the field of the supply of training and they finance the apprenticeship schools), and finally in the field of full-time school training (coordination of the offer of placement in schools, equipment; but the financing, as well as everything related to teachers, is essentially in the hands of the State). The State still creates and awards diplomas (there are no regional curricula or diplomas). The regions have little control in terms of vocational orientation (except in the case of training for unemployed youth) and have no explicit powers in matters concerning higher education. The process is therefore one of gradual decentralisation of sections of policies, essentially concerning the governance of the supply of training (choice of the occupational specialities that will be proposed or eliminated from initial education; training courses open to young unemployed workers). The direct financial power of regions in the system remains limited. Regions essentially have a “power of influence”. This power of influence was reinforced in 1994 when the regions were tasked with the responsibility of establishing a regional programme of training for young people, of ensuring coherence in the local supply of vocational training, both between the different types of initial education (full-time school training or apprenticeship) and between training within the school system and training for unemployed youth.

Thus, one could consider the decentralisation process as a form of transfer of an administered regulation. The latter is characterised by low financial incentives (financial resources are distributed according to predefined administrative criteria), by coordination between state administrations, regional councils and social partners for decisions concerning the supply of education, by the development of the contractualisation of agreed objectives with education

suppliers (Bel, 2003). One could say that the decentralisation process rests on the dominant mode of regulation of the French vocational training system (little commercial regulation, little direct weight of firms and families in decision making), while developing it and amplifying it at a territorial level.

2 Decentralisation is not a mere shift in the decision making level

However, this interpretation underestimates the extent of the changes. Examining the evolutions resulting from this mode of decentralisation raises two key questions concerning the definition and implementation of public action.

2.1 Decentralisation and recomposition of the referents of public action

As with all public policies, vocational training policy rests on a certain number of referents (Muller, Sorel, 1998). These referents, which are more or less shared by actors, define the main objectives of the policy. They form a frame of references common to all actors, guiding and legitimising their actions. In the French tradition, for example, equality of access to education, which is considered as a non-commercial good, is a strong referent (which extends to the principle of non-selective entry to university, for example). The postulated positive role of vocational training in facilitating access to employment and in fighting unemployment is another referent. Applicable to both general education and vocational education, the explicit goal of leading 80% of an age group to the Baccalauréat level is another strong and structuring national referent.

Decentralisation transfers to new actors a responsibility to conduct policy. Thus, in order to legitimise their action, these new actors must define and display their own referents. The regional councils have chosen this path, often making very different choices. Some have, at least initially, privileged national referents (i.e. leading 80% of an age group to the Baccalauréat level, and therefore expanding and diversifying the supply of vocational training by privileging the principle of freedom of choice for the students rather than by taking into account the actual needs for skills). Others define a priority policy area (the development of training through apprenticeship). Others have focused on employment (reduction of unemployment among young people). Thus, a two-fold process of diversification (according to the regions) and of intermingling of referents (combination of national and local referents) is at play. This has resulted in an evolution in the justifications for public intervention that guide the various regional policies. In order to generate new referents, many regions rely on what has been analysed as new modes of legitimisation of public action. “Forums”, where debate and multi-actor exchange can take place, are emerging. The debates can take place within employment and education sectors of a region, for example, or by large groups of occupational branches. One can suppose that these new forms of consultation are related to the fact that the regulation is both administered and involves many different actors and to the fact that the Regions do not yet have full legitimacy in this new field. In order to exercise their “power of influence” they must be able to base their actions on shared – if not

consensual – referents and derive part of their legitimacy from the organisation and conduct of debates involving a wide range of actors.

2.2 Decentralisation and de-segmentation/re-segmentation

Public policies are generally organised around “segments” defining relevant and supposedly homogeneous areas of public intervention: health, housing, education and vocational education policies. Within vocational education, sub-segments can be identified: full-time school training, apprenticeship, initial education, continuing education. And when specific institutions and instruments are given full authority over the governance and management of these sub-segments, the partitioning between these segments often becomes more pronounced. We know the traditional separations between matters that are the responsibility of one ministry and those that are the responsibility of another (In France for example, the apprenticeship system comes under the Ministry of Labour). And one of the hypotheses used to characterise the tensions to which the public policies are subjected, is that of the inadequacy of these segments in the face of new problems. For example, some authors have highlighted the relations between the health, housing and vocational training dimensions in youth unemployment, or they have shown that it is difficult to separate secondary education policy from university education policy since most high school graduates pursue their studies at university.

Decentralisation leads to a de-segmentation. Thus, in order to “ensure coherence” – at regional level – in the supply of vocational training it is necessary to overcome the partitioning between the national education administration and that dealing with employment matters, or the partitioning between agricultural training (governed by the Ministry of Agriculture) and other fields of training. Thus, the decentralisation process does not consist in the mere transfer of the same segmentation from one level of organisation to another.

In some cases, the transfer of power to the Regions has dramatically revealed the limits of the national segmentation, for example the case of the contradictions between policies of training for young unemployed workers (under the responsibility of the regions) and other instruments of employment policy (still governed by the State, theoretically so as to avoid phenomena of social dumping). Similarly the policies of vocational guidance of young people fall in a kind of “trap”: they are stuck between the national level and the regional level, and will be disorganised rather than improved by the decentralisation process. (Berthet, Gayraud, 2003).

New and unexpected effects of de-segmentation can also emerge. Thus, certain regions have started to link their regional transport policy (which they are in charge of) with their education and training policies. Others have significantly “departitioned” the logics of “population” (defined for example by the age of the beneficiaries) by proposing the same instruments to young and adult populations. Others, although they have no power in the field of higher education, have started to link their policies of secondary vocational education to the map of higher education. It is too early to draw conclusions about the results of this de-segmentation/ re-segmentation. But, just as decentralisation is not the mere transfer of the

level of the referents, it is not a mere transfer of segmented identical policies. It calls into question the very definition of policies and of their segments.

3 The slow reconfiguration of the systems of actors

Similarly, if one examines the evolution of the systems of actors, one finds that decentralisation is not a mere transfer.

3.1 A diversified and complex system of actors

In the case of France, the system of actors involved in vocational training policy is complex and heterogeneous. In the field of initial vocational education for young people (full-time school training), the Ministry of National Education is dominant in so far as it controls the flows of trainees, it has authority in terms of diploma policy and it distributes financial resources. However, it must share this responsibility with other ministries responsible for training (health, agriculture...) and must consult the representatives of the economic sector (employers, trade unions, generally divided into occupational branches) for the definition of training specialities and diplomas. In the field of training through apprenticeship, its role remains important for curricula and diplomas. But the occupational branches have a more direct power on the training mechanism (training centres for apprentices) and the offer of apprenticeship placements are decided by firms. In the area of vocational training for the unemployed, the Ministry of Labour has progressively lost the power it used to possess (in terms of implementation and financing of mechanisms of training for the unemployed), and has had to share it with occupational branches and the regions.

This system of powers and of decision-making distribution also reflects the existence of conflicts of interests between the different actors. Employers (and their representatives) seek to produce a work force that can adapt better (qualitatively) to the needs of the different jobs and seek to do so at the lowest possible cost to themselves. This supply of “adaptable workers” should preferably be abundant enough – or even over-abundant as long as it has been produced with public funds – so as to avoid upward pressure on salary levels. The public authorities seek to minimise costs while ensuring a degree of equality of access to education. They also have to take into account the demands of families, young people and trainees who put pressure on the government to provide a wide access - and preferably close access (Bel, 1996) - to training. As for trade union organisations, they plead in favour of a diversified and abundant supply, while trying to protect the value of diplomas and certificates (and therefore the salaries of their holders), particularly through the job classification systems and the collective labour agreements.

The process of decentralisation has significantly modified this system of actors, by shifting the power asymmetries, but also by revealing once again that decentralisation is not a duplication at a different territorial level.

3.2 The emergence of the key actor

Decentralising a public policy implies the existence (or the creation/ reinforcement) of a competent and legitimate actor in the territory. In the case of France, the Regional Council derives its legitimacy from the fact that it has been elected by direct universal suffrage. However, vocational training does not, a priori, fall within its competence, and its potential power does not exist in advance. Thus, a two-fold problem arises.

The first problem is that of its legitimacy in a complex system of actors and in a context of power struggles. Indeed, the delegation of authority through the legislative process is supposed to solve this problem: legitimacy is derived from legislation. But the powers transferred to the regions are actually limited and many levers (financial in particular) remain in the hands of the Central State. The “progressive” transfer of powers also generates conflicts of borders. Gaining political legitimacy (in other words being recognised as the leader by other actors) is therefore a key element in the policy of regional councils. Some regional councils choose to exercise their authority on only one selected segment of vocational training (apprenticeship for example) and neglect the other segments. Others rest on the fact that they have obtained their powers through the legislative process to reproduce, at regional level, the model of national “governance”. However, their powers being limited and because they are “weak actors” in the system, they run the risk of facing the oppositions of other actors. Other regions play the card of the “power of influence” and accept the fact that their means of intervention are limited; thus, they seek to legitimise their actions through mechanisms of consultation with all players and through the elaboration of regional programmes that are defined in consultation with a large number of actors and likely to meet with their approval (Romani, Méhaut, Richard, 1999).

In time, and more generally, a new situation has emerged. Most regional councils seek to legitimise their leadership and to compensate, through the approval of the different parties, the lack of effective power transferred to them. They develop a kind of power of agency without possessing the means of imposing this power on the other actors. This power of agency is expressed - in the two evaluations related to decentralisation (Romani et al, 1999) - by the term “key” actor. This term expresses the slow process of re-organisation around a central leader of the system of actors of vocational training at regional level. The process is slow because it must take into account the learning processes (of all actors, including of the Regional Council) on the one hand, and because of the power and territorial conflicts generated by uncertainties concerning the definition of the segments of policy and the decentralised instruments. In some regions, for example, there were strong oppositions, at least initially, between the national education administration in the regions and the Regional Council.

In the long term, however, the landscape has been modified, both in terms of national/territorial balance (the State has yielded many of its prerogatives and has had to reconsider the foundations and limits of its authority), and in terms of balance between the other actors.

3.3 The absence of certain actors

The transfer at regional level also reveals the incompleteness of the process of decentralisation and sometimes the fact that certain actors, supposedly present in the regions, are actually absent.

The process is incomplete in so far as some actors do not participate to it, at least in its first stages. In some regions, for example, the Health Ministry is in charge of health and social care training and takes little or no part in regional discussion and coordination. Similarly, the AFPA - the main supplier of training for unemployed adults – did not participate in the first stages of the decentralisation process. Thus, adopting a segmentation such as the traditional national segmentation is incompatible with the objective of “ensuring coherence” in vocational training inasmuch as certain actors “exclude themselves” from regional coordination because of their national prerogatives.

Furthermore, for historical reasons related to the institutional configurations, some actors supposed to be present, are actually absent or poorly organised regionally. It is mainly the case of economic actors (Casella, Freyssinet, 1999). In the history of industrial relations in France, and of their expression in the field of vocational training, the representatives of occupational branches have played a central role in the consultation processes at national level. An occupational branch is indeed the “natural” place for discussion in so far as its representatives are organised, and in so far as institutions can put the agreements into practice (for example, by listing the diplomas recognised by the collective industrial agreements or through the classification of jobs and workers); moreover, an occupational branch derives part of its identity and boundaries from its ability to have branch-specific occupational diplomas and certificates recognised. In France, the institutionalisation of the different partners that comprise an occupational branch also rests, partly, on their ability to produce rules of access and of classification into the different job categories included in the branch.

The way in which economic and industrial relations are structured in France is an obstacle to the reproduction by the regional authorities of the national model (with the hypothesis of a greater proximity of “economic needs”). Either the branches (i.e. the employers organisations in branches) are poorly organised at the territorial level (which is not compatible with their economic and social logic, for example in the field of electronics, banking and insurance), or, when they do exist at territorial level (because the productive fabric is made of small enterprises, as in the case of building industry, the catering and hotel industry, or the sectors of retail and automobile repairs), they tend to duplicate the national analyses and propositions without being able to capture the specificities of the territories. And this lack of regional organisation on the employer side can also be found on the trade union side. (Casella, Freyssinet, 1999).

But it is combined with the central question of the control of vocational training funds. The management of funds for vocational training (apprenticeship, training for young unemployed people, continuing training for workers) are for the most part managed by joint management organisations linked to specific occupational branches, and when these organisations

distribute these funds they tend to privilege the training centres that are related to those occupational branches. Thus there exists a kind of “captive” distribution of funds. The regional councils have little direct control over these funds or institutions and must consult with the latter. The history of decentralisation is, as a result, marked by tensions between the branch logic and territorial logic, related to the control of the funds for vocational training (Meriaux, 1999).

This leads us to the previously mentioned hypothesis of societal dependency and of “institutional inertia”. But here again, the facts and analyses must be put in perspective. By revealing the “void” of actors in the regions, the process of decentralisation has had at least three consequences.

First of all, it has forced certain players of the national game to question the efficiency of their territorial structure and has encouraged them to regionalise their organisation. Thus, the MEDEF (the leading employer organisation in France) which is mainly structured around occupational branches, has taken steps towards the territorialisation of its organisation, in particular by forming a network of territorial delegates conveying employers’ opinions at regional level. Similarly, the CFDT, a trade union that is mostly present in the sectors of activities where the organisation into occupational branches is less pronounced (trade for example) has played the card of regional structures.

Secondly, the Regional councils, seeking to achieve economic legitimacy, will seek to promote the emergence of actors that are “representative” of the economic world, so as to fill the void mentioned above. Some, for example, have taken steps to expand the traditional boundaries of occupational branches, by encouraging the development of groups around certain sectors of activity (tourism and aeronautics for example). Other regions have defined entities that are smaller than occupational branches in order to take into account regional specificities (pleasure boats’ engines, as opposed to mechanics in which automobile mechanics is dominant).

Finally, some regional councils attempt to shift from an organisation into occupational branches to a territorial organisation. Discussions then occur mainly at the level of employment sectors sometimes in direct relations with the firms present in this basin, or with representatives of employers (associations of local employers).

Thus, decentralisation, by revealing the weakness or the absence of certain actors pushes towards other forms of organisation. “Emerging” actors have progressively entered the game, thus modifying (at least marginally) the old forms of consultation and the system of actors of the centrally administered regulation.

4 Decentralisation and the conduct of public action: instruments and evaluation

The shift in scales, from the nation to the region, also generates new tools of public intervention.

4.1 Decentralisation and information

In a multi-actor system, information has become a resource of utmost importance for the actors (Cuelpepper, 2003). This information can be public or private (generated by branches or firms for example). It can be related to the state of the supply of training, the flows of trainees and students, their access to employment, the state of the labour market for such and such an occupation or an evaluation of the possible evolution of an occupation. Part of this information already existed in the context of national procedures. But it must be reconstructed at the level of each region, or even at a finer level (an employment basin for example). It must be assimilated, shared and recognised as legitimate by all actors.

This renewed need for information has led to the development of regional “observatories” of employment and training. Certain occupational branches have developed their own tools in the regions, and the regional councils are progressively acquiring data and information reports that help them define policies.

Almost paradoxically, the transfer of decision-making from national to territorial level leads to an increasing need for information. The refinement of knowledge and statistics tools, especially if they are shared, eventually has an impact on political orientations: it has become more difficult for an actor to defend a unilateral opinion exclusively based on the information he possesses.

Thus decentralisation reveals new needs for information as well as for new information tools. Mastering information has become a more strategic element in the interactions between actors (Bertrand, Hillau, Richard, 2003).

4.2 Decentralisation and the tools of public action

Similarly, the role of certain tools used to conduct and implement policies in the regions has become more significant. We have highlighted that the logic of a centrally-administered supply of training has been maintained. Unlike in other countries, the financial tool (for example the direct distribution of resources according to the flow of students and trainees, or according to the rate of success at the exams or of placement in the labour market or even the system of vouchers for students and families) is not the most important tool. For the most part the regulation of the system is done through contracts or quasi-contracts between the administrative authorities (in this case, the Regional Council and its partners) and the training institutions. This type of governance – proximity governance - has led to a significant evolution in the tools used.

The regional councils have developed analysis reports on the demands of training institutions and refer to them before authorising the creation of new sections of training. Justifications for the creation or expansion of a training section must be supplied; these justifications consist of increasingly precise information such as data on the expected flows of students and trainees, data related to the needs of the labour market, or forecasts on the students' professional future.

In the field of training for adults, procedures of quality certification have been already implemented and have now been adopted in the field of initial education (in the apprenticeship system for example).

Finally, because they increasingly need to justify, *ex-post*, the relevance of their political choices, some regional councils now implement these procedures more systematically.

These three tendencies are, admittedly, not specific to decentralised policies. They already existed in Central State policies; and this movement now seems to affect all public policies. But the phenomenon of decentralisation has most definitely given it impetus.

5 Conclusion

Applied to the field of vocational training, decentralisation, especially when the traditional mode of governance is maintained (in this case the administered mode of regulation), can be initially interpreted as nothing more than a scale transfer. Localised actors are supposed to be better able to understand what the needs (of students, trainees, firms) are. The system is then supposed to gain - through proximity - efficiency (particularly in the adjustment of training to the needs of the economy), even though fears are sometimes expressed that this might occur at the expense of equality and social justice.

The processes of decentralisation actually raise other questions. Even when decentralisation is positioned in continuity with a dominant mode of regulation, it implies a process of reconstruction of the foundations of policies. It reveals the deficiencies of the segmentation of national policies and redefines the boundaries of what we call vocational training. It rests on a number of actors, some of whom modify their position (power asymmetries) while pushing for the emergence of other actors. Finally it modifies the "tool box" of public policies. All these processes are necessarily slow. They imply a learning process by the actors, their repositioning in relation to others and the construction of new tools. Ten years after the process started, it is still difficult to say that the new landscape is stabilised. And in spite of the existence of systems of national evaluation (Richard, Verdier, 2004), it is still difficult to make a precise assessment of the impact of this process. But it is through its related effects on the overall architecture of the education system as a whole (from the definition of policies to the tools used to implement them) that its long-term impact will probably be revealed.

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Box number 1: The main components of the vocational training system and the stages of their decentralisation

Initial vocational training of young people takes place in the form of full-time school training (the dominant form of training; mostly in public vocational training schools) or through apprenticeship (alternating training in training centres and training at work). The apprenticeship system was decentralised in 1983 (financing by the regions of the centres of apprenticeship). As for full-time school training, the regions were given the power, in 1993, to ensure coherence in the supply of training. They also have the responsibility of financing the schools (buildings). But the staff is recruited and remunerated by the relevant ministries who also allocate staff to schools.

“Continuing” education for young people (essentially for young unemployed people after they leave school or the apprenticeship system) essentially takes place through training courses that vary in duration (they can be alternating training courses or other types of courses).

Continuing education for adults falls under the competency of employers and of branch joint funds for matters concerning human resources. The region finances training courses for unemployed people and plays a role in the supply of training (but until 2004 had no power over the leading supplier of training - the AFPA, which used to fall under the competency of the Ministry of Labour).

The Regional councils have also implemented (or reinforced) measures that were progressively abandoned by the State: for example, evening classes or courses of “social promotion” for adults wishing to start studying again.

Box number 2: The regional authorities

The Regional Council is an assembly elected by direct universal suffrage. It derives its resources from taxes - the rates of which it determines – and from funds allocated by the State on account of the authorities transferred to the regions and which the Central State no longer possesses. Metropolitan France is divided into 22 regions that vary in size from 700 000 inhabitants to over 10 000 000 (but most regions have between 1 and 3 millions inhabitants).

The national administrations have at their disposal deconcentrated services (“Rectorat” for national education, regional and *départementales* directions for the Ministry of Labour) that implement the national policies in the regions. These deconcentrated administrations have progressively lost part of their authority in favour of the regional councils and they must collaborate with the latter.

Various official committees of consultation between the state and the regions or between the regions and the social partners exist at regional level.