

**Summary of the book: « Des partenariats publics-privés pour l’insertion des demandeurs d’emploi
: une question de confiance ? »**

I. Contextual and methodological framework

At this time of policies towards the activation of unemployed persons and a high rate of unemployment, it seems appropriate to examine the institutional reforms of public employment services (PESs), in particular as regards partnerships. Cooperation between PESs and private operators seem to present a renewal of the practices of supporting unemployed persons throughout the course of their socio-professional integration. These partnerships seem to constitute the suitable response to the ever-increasing needs in terms of coaching and training of unemployed persons, who are becoming increasingly numerous and have very varied profiles (young adults, illiterates, women with children, over- 50s, detainees, ...). The PESs have come under considerable pressure from the government and the European Commission to reduce unemployment figures. Easily placed in the media spotlights, they must justify their policies and strategies of activation of unemployed persons and this, quite often, in socio-economic and institutional contexts in crisis or undergoing the throes of reform. A study of the partnerships in employment thus appears essential if we hope to understand the “backstage” of activation, that is to say, the way in which the public and private players interact on a daily basis to construct public policy.

The market for the support of unemployed persons has experienced some major upheavals in recent decades, in particular subsequent to the intervention of Europe. In 1997 the European employment strategy and Convention 181 of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) invited the PESs to set up joint operations with commercial operators (private employment agencies, public limited companies, non-profit associations, etc.). Since the late 1990s the PESs have been working alongside private non-profit operators (socio-professional integration bodies, companies for training through work experience, local missions, etc.). The public, non-commercial private and commercial private players must now share the unemployed persons support market which, for the PESs, means the loss of a monopoly (Rousseau, 2005). The European directives have favoured the extension of types of players - intermediaries - on the unemployed persons support market and the formalisation of practices in partnerships.

Seen thus, the PESs create a "partnership", the agents of which pursue the task of selecting and supporting the operators in the implementation of their service. They decide to use the techniques of calls for tenders (calls for projects or calls for initiatives/on invitation) to set up cooperations of

subcontracting with private service-providers. The partnership services professionalise recourse to third parties through the installation of selection, monitoring and assessment procedures for support and training projects designed for unemployed persons. That professionalisation then finds expression in the formalisation of various documents (specifications, general clauses and conditions, model candidacy form, cooperation agreements, evaluation grids, model interim and final activity reports, etc.) concerning the rules of cooperation.

Our interest is engaged in the study of cooperations between the PESs and private operators in socio-professional integration in Belgium and in the French-speaking areas of Switzerland. Besides their role of employment and/or training operator, the public employment services (PESs) are now coming to acquire the role of "regulatory institutions" (Georges, 2007, 2007b) on the labour market. We are therefore interested in the way in which the PESs manage these "public-private partnerships" as regards the selection of private operators, management of the partnership relation and the tracking of projects set up by the operators. These joint operations constitute new forms of regulation of the labour market and seem to be a technique of renewal of public policy (Laino and Padovani, 2000). They emerge in a perspective of reduction of public spending (Campagnac, 2009), of a political desire to initiate a progressive alignment between the different players concerned by employment (Dahl and Lindblom, 1953) and, also, of an impossibility for the PESs to organise, within themselves, all of the support necessary for its beneficiaries because of lack of (financial, human, infrastructural, etc.) resources.

The private operators are given a sort of "mandate" (Hughes, 2006) by the PESs to cover part of the missions for the support and/or training of unemployed persons. The delegation of the jobseeker support mission raises several questions to which the analyses in this book offers answers. First, how does the PES place its trust in private operators? Second, how does it manage the partnerships created with the private sector? Third, how do the interested parties experience the cooperation in terms of confidence? And, fourth, what are the effects of the partnership model on the partnership relation? To answer these questions we conducted field studies with certain PES partnerships.

Three studies were conducted, of which two in Belgium (Actiris in the Brussels Region and Forem in the Wallon Region) and one in Switzerland (Office Cantonal pour l'Emploi, Geneva), between April 2011 and November 2012. We have integrated the partnership services of the PESs over several months to observe the partnership activities and interactions between the agents and the service-providers. Following this intense observation work (N=107), semi-structured and comprehensive interviews were held with agents of PESs (N=52) and also with service-providers (N=31). In total,

eighty-three interviews were held. The three PESs were chosen because each displayed a specific model of partnership, allowing us to study the respective impact on the progress of cooperation.

The PESs in Belgium mobilise the call for projects (around 18 000 subsidised places for more or less 330 000 unemployed persons in the two regions studied) as a technique for the creation of partnerships, while the Swiss PES relies on the call for initiatives (around 1 300 places for more or less 17 000 unemployed persons). To ensure correct provision of their service, the agents of the partnership services of the PESs hold meetings that may be individual (operator and agent face to face) or collective (operators and agents coming together in themed meetings) and standardised (meetings planned and convened by the PES), or "tailored" (meetings organised according to the development of the project and the operator's requirements) with the private service-providers. Setting out from the combination of these modalities, three partnership managements models are identified: 1) a collective, tailored management in Actiris, 2) an individualised, standardised management in Forem and 3) an individualised, tailored management in the Office Cantonal pour l'Emploi.

We studied the impact of the partnership on the internal process (critical situations, tests) and context variables (forms of partnership), on autonomisation (passage from inter-individual to a systemic confidence) and on the capacitation (acquisition of additional capabilities) for the interested parties in the public-private partnership. To that end the empirical material was analysed against the yardstick of an original model study of the partnership relation founded on the articulation of the theory of justification (Boltanski and Thévenot, 1991; Boltanski and Chiapello, 1999), the sociology of confidence (Teubner, 1996; Luhmann, 2006; Ogien, 2006) and the theory of capacitation (Sen, 2000, 2005), in which confidence appears as a tool of analysis of the relation between the members of the partnership.

II. Main conclusions of the study

To delegate their jobseeker support and training missions the public employment services select service-providers. The analysis concerns only the two Belgian cases (Actiris and Forem) since they both mobilise the technique of call for projects, which involves an elaborate process for the selection of operators; such, however, is not the case in Switzerland. The private operators submit to the PES a bidder's file for their support and/or training project. Many of the files are "problem" files, because they do not meet the selection criteria laid down by the Office de l'Emploi. These "critical" files cause debates between the agents, bringing out the argumentation and logical reasoning of each of them. We focus on the main registers of justification applied by the agents in the process of selection of future partners, which allows, at the end of the Chapter, to present a cognitive map of PES agents.

This map reveals a specific articulation of shared worlds. The agents are torn by a fundamental tension between their mission of creation of partnerships (connectionist world) and their role which is to ensure respect of the rules of a system of contracting with the Office de l'Emploi (civic world). The agents swap arguments to uphold a decision for each candidacy file and, consequently, to establish - or not - a contracting with the operator. These arguments belong to other registers of justification: the domestic, for which we have distinguished the dimension of the familiar and the authoritarian, and opinion, for which we have identified both the positive and negative dimension. Each aspect serves either the connectionist world or the civic world. The register of opinion, driven by the commercial register and by the industrial register, has a link with the world of inspiration. It is important to point out that these not all of these registers operate at the same time in the resolution of a problematic situation.

The arguments advanced by agents of Forem tend to belong to the familiar domestic register, while the arguments of agents of Actiris are situated rather in the authoritarian domestic register. The main reason may possibly be the type of support offered to its service-providers by the Office de l'Emploi. Forem mobilises an individualised support while Actiris uses a collective support. It follows that the degree of familiarity between the parties concerned will vary appreciably. Forem-side cooperations are marked by a strong relation of proximity, which is less the case for Actiris. This high degree of familiarity prompts Forem agents to be more inclined to make arrangements to obtain or to stop the cooperation with the service-provider. The framework of cooperation appears not to be uninvolved in the way in which agents will create partnerships.

The contractual understanding between the PES and the private operator is established for a number of years, according to the time-span of the call for tenders. The service-providers on the jobseeker support market are numerous. They compete with each other, especially for-profit versus non-profit operators. In exchange for the support and training of unemployed persons the operators receive funding. So meeting targets is equally important to both. Involvement of the private players in the management of public assets must therefore flag up a problem, as the PESs cater to a mission of general economic interest and the common good, whereas the service-providers side with some sort of "profit-first" mentality. Whatever goals these latter may happen to be pursuing, do they really serve the needs of unemployed persons? Ought they not rather be developing strategies, through the instrumentalisation of unemployed persons, to square up to this "market-driven", "profit-first" persuasion?

The PESs and service-providers exchange a set of guarantees once they embark upon one or another form of cooperation. The partnership relation is experienced as some kind of "quid pro quo". This

much is soon proven with the partnership itself. Expectations may be of an administrative nature (receipt of reply letter, late receipt of partnership agreement, unwieldiness of administrative system, changes in the same, difficulty quantifying outcomes of renewal the agreement); relational (presence of unacceptable behaviour); organisational (absence of suitable candidates in training courses and non-respect of obligations) or what you will. As soon as the reciprocal consideration is perceived as being at all no longer sufficient, the partners begin to doubt each other. The partnership relation is then subjectively experienced as a "gamble". It may even be faced on with a challenge ("*So! what's the worst that can happen next!?*") once the partner feels at risk (for example, financially). These tests endanger the relation of trust between partners. Trust may fail and yield to mistrust. And so it is that we now witness a specific articulation of logical forms of trust and confidence laying bare the internal dynamics of a partnership.

Analysis of the empirical material would suggest that certain service-providers subscribe to a "for-profit" logic, reacting to the more managerial line of thought (quantification, low financing, shortest turnarounds, etc.) of the jobseeker support and training market. The same analysis also appears to show that the partnership model has an influence on the way in which public and private players react to the "tests" (relational, organisational, administrative, etc.) thrown up by the very fact of cooperation. So, the agents of the PESs adapt their activities according to the behaviour of the private operators. The rules of cooperation set by the PESs are in a constant state of redefinition, adjusted as and when interactions between concerned parties so require. This being the case we are now coming to better understand the way in which the PESs manage the new forms of regulation of the labour market.

The operators react to tests in one of two ways. They engage either in "ordinary, everyday" business or in "risk" business (overbooking candidacy and/or bidder files, smuggling, illicit public traffic, resistance, etc.), which must needs will have an influence on "the good name" of their business. So involvement of agents from the PESs will differ according to the strategies adopted by their partners. As for the "ordinary, everyday" business, the agents take a "protection" stance towards operators; as for "risk" business, they will enforce the rules, taking the "authoritarian" stance. Whatever the test, the agents will do all that they can to provide information, advice, documents, rules, "gifts", etc. All of these elements are emblematic of the partnership relation. The objects will help the partners to once again experience a relation of trust and confidence. To rediscover a cooperation characterised by some form of "quid pro quo"; the agents of PESs should share these objects between themselves and with the operators.

The articulation of logical forms of trust lays bare the process of autonomisation of the partnership. The partnership relation is very much autonomised from the outset of the cooperation, through the introduction of "representation guarantees" by each concerned party. It has its ranking on the scale of systemic autonomisation of confidence. Cooperation will, in any case, "de-autonomise" itself on sight of proofs experienced by one or another of the partners as a chance or a challenge. In that case the relation then belongs to the scale of autonomisation of confidence in interpersonal terms. It will autonomise itself once the agents of the PESs introduce objects both symbolic and tangible (documents, rules, values, etc.) to mitigate or resolve the tests.

The analyses of the life of the partnership confirm the cognitive map as set out at the end of the chapter on the selection of service-providers. They do, however, posit a link between the domestic and opinion registers. The tests would appear to indicate that the operators' attitudes are moderate to risk. The moderate attitudes are mindful of the "good name" of the operator. They are espoused by agents more disposed to working in the interests of and to protecting the operator. In the other corner, the risk attitudes give the service-provider a suspect reputation. The agents step in to enforce the rules. They take an authoritarian stance towards the operator.

The comparison of Belgian partnership models with the Geneva model strengthens the belief that the context variables have a substantial influence on the way of managing "tests". The Geneva PES mobilises the technique of call for initiatives and tailored, individualised support and training, offering operators leeway for expression, negotiation and discussion, unlike a call for projects, offering mainly the capability of expression, and thereby seriously skewing the partnership relation. We note that the private operators tend to rely more on risk strategies for partnership (and sometime unemployed persons), while the rules and procedures for cooperation do not allow sufficient room for negotiation with the agents of the PESs. Then again, they use moderated strategies whenever the ways and means of the partnership give them the opportunity to express themselves, discuss and negotiate with the agents. Given its specific configuration, introduction of the Geneva model helps to examine in more detail the issue of capacitation of the partnership.

The in-depth study of the context variables - through the techniques of creation and management of the partnership - shows, through specific combinations, an influence on the autonomisation and the capacitation of the partnership. Contradicting the initial hypothesis - according to which the process of autonomisation and capacitation develop in parallel - analysis would now appear to show that the two are not automatically connected in any manner of form. They may equally well be inversely proportionate, in that a partnership may be autonomised yet not particularly capacitating or, conversely, autonomised yet greatly increasing the capacities of its members.

So, the Actiris partnership management model is low-capacitising and high-autonomising, as it offers few opportunities for negotiation and discussion with the service-providers; that said, it does allow the partnership, systematically, to rise to a position of trust through collective support and training, depending on the external operators. However, the model applied by Forem is low autonomisation side and low as regards increase of capacity, as it rather tends to keep the partnership at the level of interpersonal confidence and the stage of expression, offering its service-providers little if indeed any possibilities for negotiation and discussion. The Swiss model, however, is both high-autonomising and high-capacitising, as it allows the partnership to reaffirm its belief - systematically - through a tailored system of support and training delivered by service-providers, offering them the possibility of negotiating or discussing on a range of aspects concerning the partnership (price, number of applicants to train, etc).

These analyses show that it is crucial to plan the framework of cooperation in advance, because there will be knock-on effects for the progress of the partnership. The actions of the players through the development of strategies are conditioned by the forms of collaboration in which the concerned parties have to interact. The partnership models are neither neutral nor are they non-reactive. They all have their limits; the players may turn these to their advantage whenever they find things going wrong. *Public policy* is steered by the characteristics of the partnership, such that the interested parties will interact or, better, will "adjust" the rules of cooperation. These "adjustments" may, of course, have their impact on the future careers of unemployed persons.

The development of strategies to square up to the trials inherent in cooperation is an indication of the balance of power between the players. These practices include, for instance, the overbooking of candidate and/or applicant files, illegal promotion of their training, poor quality and "illegal public traffic". Not all service-providers will resort to them but, especially the old-school operators seem to be more prone to do so, since earlier experiences with cooperation with the Office de l'Emploi soon enough taught them the imperfections of the system of the call for projects. These strategies have a "masked" or even "clandestine" character. Some of them may even be said to be "harmful" for the (re-)integration of unemployed persons, while others facilitate the same. The operators juggle with the rules of the labour market, revealing them now as "expedient illegals", now as "boycotters". Given the "Manager Mind" (Ogien, 1995) of the labour market, unemployed persons are sometimes instrumentalised by private operators who can thereby reach their targets and obtain funding from the PESs.

III. Partnership management: obstacles and facilitators

Partnerships and confidence are the basis of our societies. Without combined effort and without mutual trust it is impossible to set up any kind of project. Which is why each individual has his or her responsibility in the partnerships that he or she develops. Particular attention must be paid to the way in which partnerships are constructed and managed, since certain projects are difficult to get off the ground, if not simply fail or show little, if any, return on initial effort, for instance because the relations between the interested parties are mired in low mutual esteem if not outright suspicion. We would like to bring out, on the basis of some main analytical findings, the factor that makes or breaks a good cooperation between partners, that is to say, mutual trust between them. We also wish to provide advice regarding the management of partnerships, whether they fall to be classified within the support of unemployed persons or in other areas. After all, it is not more welcome and constructive to be able to work in a context of cooperations that are based on trust and confidence? That is to say, positive, constructive relations of trust, confidence, reliability, professionalism, respect, readiness to listen to each other, mutual understanding, openness of mind and generosity of spirit.

Confidence in a partnership is a complex issue. It is not self-evident. It does not exist on a for-granted level. It is built up slowly but surely between the interested parties via the "baby steps" principle whereby each individual is involved in the relation and shows signs of confidence in the others. Confidence is necessary if we are to set off on the adventure of any new cooperation, but it may also be a matter of risk, since a member's unrealised expectations may be experienced as some kind of treason. Creating confidence allows the reduction of uncertainties regarding what the partnership is actually all about in the first place. In all joint operations, "trials" (administrative, financial, relational, organisational difficulties, ...) will surely crop up throughout the life of the partnership. They test the confidence between the partners, that is, the solidity of the cooperation. These critical situations are therefore vital for the construction of the relation that will only grow stronger with the progressive introduction, by one of the partners, of symbolic and tangible objects (values, rules, documents, information, etc.).

Our study highlights makes the point that the actual model of partnership will influence the progress of a cooperation. The variables we have identified include, *inter alia*, type of call for tenders, forms of partnership management (individual or collective support/training, also tailored or standardised) and form of decision-making. It therefore seems essential to consider the preferred type of relation before committing to a partnership, since that would necessarily have consequences not only for the partnership, but also for the beneficiaries of actions implemented under these partnerships. The

decisions to be taken must be taken with due regard for the desired degree of symmetry / asymmetry in the partnership (production and circulation of information, decision-making, possibility of negotiation, etc.) and the desired degree (greater or lesser) of control between partners. We have noted a prevalence of risk strategies (here, poor quality of service, traffic of candidates, overbooking, etc.) developed by the more controlled partner, situated on the side of asymmetry. These strategies appear to be less current when the framework of cooperation offers the same possibilities in terms of expression, negotiation and discussion for all interested parties.

A certain number of factors may block the good progress of the partnership or cause problems later down the line. Not only lack of discussion between the parties in the elaboration of the project, the signature of the contract and the form of functioning between partners, calls for tenders that set in competition private commercial operators and non-commercial operators, the unwieldiness and slowness of government and public institutions (lack of reactivity), but also the asymmetry of information between the partners. We also note the fact that, in certain public-private partnership management models, the role of the partnership service agents is confined to simply passers-on, intermediaries, which does rapid decision-making no favours. In a general way, the recurrence of problems leaves the partners, whether private operator-side (lack of professionalism, abuse of trainees, difficult relations, etc.), in public or employment services (internal dysfunction, change management problems (HR, process, documents, partnership policy), administrative unwieldiness, etc.) again faced with the realities of the labour and employment market (difficult mobilisation compounded by demotivation of unemployed persons, lack of employment, precarious nature of jobs, etc.).

On the other hand many factors facilitate the good progress of the partnership (and of the project to be developed in that framework) and the creation of trust and confidence. Such as respect of due dates when set in advance. For example, for the reply letter concerning the selection of projects by the public employment services, the signature of the partnership agreement and the forwarding of information and new model documents for the production of management reports. This addresses rather the public employment services that, for some, are too set in a post-Taylorist, just-in-time logic and unexpected change, which prevents the meeting of deadlines. A further element is the fact of being trained up for private operators by an agent in the PES partnership service who might have to make a number of decisions in rapid succession concerning the project to be implemented. In this perspective an individualised training (individual meetings of operator and agent) and a tailored training (meetings according to project requirements) in the broader context of a call for initiatives would seem to be the most appropriate context, combining as it does flexibility of the organisation of

meetings between partners and the possibility, for each interested party, to negotiate and discuss, that is to say, to enter into a logic of co-construction.