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International mobility for 'young people with fewer opportunities': a project evaluation

'Young people with fewer opportunities' (YPFOs) are the priority target of the most recent European programmes for young people. A social experiment, funded by the *Fonds d'expérimentation pour la jeunesse*/Fund for Experimental Youth Projects and evaluated by Céreq, had the aim of encouraging such young people to be internationally mobile. The evaluation showed that, while the young people certainly benefited, the scheme actually had its greatest impact on the actors involved and their methods of coordination.

International
mobility
evaluation survey
Qualifications
Apprenticeship

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There are many schemes offering support for mobility, but the beneficiaries are usually young people with good qualifications and employment prospects, such as university students or young people looking for work placements, for example. Moreover, they often lack clarity and focus. Young people with very few qualifications, doing badly at school, living in precarious circumstances or even as vagrants or subject to discrimination have little if any access to mobility programmes.

So taking as a starting point the observation that schemes offering support for mobility do indeed exist but are restricted to certain groups, notably the most academically able, the *mission locale* (employment information and advice service for young people) in the Greater Besançon travel-to-work area embarked on an experimental scheme aimed at 'young people with fewer opportunities' (to use the terminology used by the European Commission, cf. box on the next page). This experimental scheme was launched as one of a number of projects funded by the *Fonds d'expérimentation pour la jeunesse*/Fund for Experimental Youth Projects and evaluated by Céreq's

associated regional centre in Besançon. **The aim of the project was re-engage so-called 'disadvantaged' young people through international mobility**, with a view to enabling them to develop their career objectives.

The evaluation produced two main results. The first concerns the effects of international mobility on the young people in question. Travel certainly seems to have a positive effect, re-engaging individual participants and helping them become more closely involved in developing their career objectives. The second concerns the factors determining the success of an experimental programme of this kind, with **the coordination of the actors on the ground** being an essential ingredient in its success.

Encouraging disadvantaged young people to be mobile: an innovative local experiment

The target population for this experimental project was young people aged between 16 and 25 with few if any qualifications ●●●



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'Young people with fewer opportunities': between concept and operational reality

It was within the framework of European programmes for young people – the Youth Programme (2000-2006) followed by the Youth in Action Programme covering the period 2007 to 2013 – that the notion of 'young people with fewer opportunities' (YPFOs) was first set forth. The term denotes young people with handicaps or those coming from disadvantaged cultural, geographical or socio-economic backgrounds. The young people in question generally fall into the 15 to 28 age group.

The current EU 'Youth in Action' programme aims to give all young people, and particularly the most disadvantaged, better access to schemes that offer support for mobility and non-formal education. In its pursuit of greater social cohesion, the programme draws on an 'inclusion' strategy made up of several strands: it aims, on the one hand, to ensure that YPFOs have equal access to the programme itself and, on the other, to improve their social inclusion, active citizenship and employability. More broadly, its overall goal is to develop a sense of active citizenship, solidarity and tolerance through involvement in building the Union's future. Geographical mobility within the EU is one preferred means of achieving this end, as are the development of non-formal learning and intercultural dialogue.

Over and above the concept itself, if the programme is to operate functionally, and the funds to be distributed accordingly, then the target population has to be identified. Defining what constitutes a 'young person with fewer opportunities' is less simple than it might appear. The definition is not fixed since it varies according to the individuals in question and the national context. As far as individuals are concerned, their lived experience of 'fewer opportunities' will depend on their occupation, the area in which they live and their own subjectivity. 'Having fewer opportunities' means different things in different countries and does not refer to the same realities. This makes it far from easy to develop common denominators, which are still in the course of being constructed. In those EU member states with very high youth unemployment rates (Spain, Greece), YPFOs will be defined by reference to the difficulties experienced in entering the world of work and the risks of exclusion from the labour market; in France, the tendency would be to associate them with young people from the so-called 'problem areas' of the country's towns and cities. In Germany, they would be defined as those with low levels of qualification and occupational mobility.

In France, the implementation of the EU inclusion strategy for YPFOs, as set out in the European Youth in Action programme, illustrates the societal specificities of this population in France. Indeed, those specificities are evident from the very nature of the priorities established for public action in this area. The three national policy strands being pursued are aimed at three target groups: young people in problem areas of towns and cities, young people in certain rural areas and young people with handicaps (physical or mental). One principle common to all three groups is the encouragement of intervention. The aim is to strengthen YPFOs' participation in educational mobility activities in Europe as an important phase in the labour market entry process. The recommended approach to operationalising this principle is to establish networks at local, regional and national level involving the various actors providing support for the three categories of young people listed above.

The experimental project carried out by the *mission locale* in Greater Besançon is an emblematic example of the implementation of both the European directives on and the French recommendations for a social inclusion policy aimed at YPFOs.

●●● (level IV and below, i.e. the *baccalauréat*/upper secondary leaving certificate and below), in apprenticeships or in receipt of support from the *mission locale* in the Greater Besançon travel-to-work area. Thus this was a population that had few opportunities to take part in the standard programmes offering support for mobility.

The aim of the experimental project was to increase this population's access to mobility by encouraging participation in a collective undertaking (organising a project and travelling abroad) or by offering support for individuals wishing to travel. The importance of local factors and of territorial intelligence* is evident from the two sides of the experiment: the population targeted by the *mission locale*, on the one hand, and the network of actors called upon to assist in the project, on the other. The aim of the

project was to assist participants in gaining a better understanding of the challenges posed by mobility by organising a stay abroad with the aid of local actors operating as a network in support of a specific but heterogeneous target population (apprentices, on the one hand, and young clients of the *mission locale*, on the other) and a common project.

In order to win over individuals with little connection to the existing schemes offering support for international mobility, or simply having no access to them, it was necessary to put in place appropriate support measures, to make the young people feel secure in the steps they were taking and to centralise the existing information. Embarking on an international mobility project is an often lengthy and complex process that involves an increasing number of people as it proceeds through a number of different phases: contacting a 'mobility counsellor', presentation of a coherent plan, putting together a file with all the necessary documentation, refresher course in the language of the country, searching out information on the destination, preparations for arrival (accommodation, transport, etc.).

Organising an international mobility project is certainly a complex undertaking, particularly for a disadvantaged young person who has difficulty in planning for the near future and assessing the possible benefits of spending time abroad. Planning and implementing the Besançon 'support for mobility' project would have been inconceivable without a strong partnership, since the information required prior to the project launch was just as important as the support to be provided.

Consequently, the organisation leading the project, the *mission locale* in the Greater Besançon travel-to-work area, sought from the outset to involve as many actors as possible with an interest in the issues addressed by the project and made constant efforts to widen the circle of actors. A steering committee was set up as soon as the project was launched. When initially constituted, its membership included representatives of the Regional Council of Franche-Comté, the regional association of *missions locales* in Franche-Comté, the 'Espace Jeunes' *mission locale* in the Greater Besançon travel-to-work area, the regional youth information centre (CRIJ), the regional department for young people, sport and social cohesion (DRJSCS), the city of Besançon and its centre for social action (CCAS), the joint group for the promotion of apprenticeships and the training centre for agricultural apprentices in Doubs.

The steering committee worked on the measures to be put in place, which were ultimately of three types: stays abroad, an event promoting international mobility and targeting YPFOs in particular and the establishment of a collaborative platform in which the various actors concerned were to participate (cf. box p. 3).

* *Territorial intelligence* is the science having for object the sustainable development of territories and having for subject the territorial community.
<http://www.territorial-intelligence.eu/>

<http://thema.univ-fcomte.fr>

The evaluation: methodology and limitations

The evaluation was based on a qualitative method involving interviews with three categories of people: participants in the scheme, the project initiators and the local actors called on in the course of the project. The interviews were supplemented by direct observation of the project's preparatory and set-up phases. The wide range of measures put in place, which were also targeted at different groups, made the exercise difficult.

Qualitative evaluation is effective and necessary in order to bring out the interplay between the actors and their effects on the territories in question. However, unless a quantitative evaluation involving a sufficiently large sample is also carried out, it does not in itself enable us to examine in detail changes in participants' attitudes or their trajectories. This limitation is further compounded by the fact that it is as yet too early to observe the effects of mobility on the young people.

Over and above the limitations of the methodology, the evaluation does highlight the dual impact of the experiment, both on participants and, even more clearly, on the dynamic of the partnership between the actors. In this respect, an important change in the ability of the local actors to network around this collaborative project can be observed.

The benefits of mobility for the development of career objectives and self-perception

The qualitative surveys of the young participants revealed the initial effects of the experimental project on the target groups. True, assessment of these effects needs to be supplemented by observations on a larger sample. Nevertheless, significant changes have taken place and are reflected in educational and career plans. They are also reflected, more broadly, in changes in the behaviour of these young people who have experienced both cultural openness and the unfamiliarity of living in a different country.

The young people who went to live abroad for a time were genuinely involved in setting up a project; in most cases, moreover, the expectations they had formulated were fulfilled. Preparation prior to departure proved to be crucial to the success of the stay. This 'upstream' phase, which was planned and implemented by the young people themselves, was intended to exclude any element of chance in order to prevent any possibility of them suffering further failure. It was important that this international mobility was tailored as closely as possible to the individual aspirations and abilities of these

young people, who had already suffered from a lack of self-esteem earlier in their lives.

For some of them, their stay abroad has had repercussions on the development of their educational and career objectives. The time spent away from their usual environment gave them an opportunity to examine their own feelings and motives and to discover some new ways of doing things (new manners, know-how of various kinds, interpersonal skills). In many cases, these diverse learning processes enabled the young people to re-engage with their own lives and sometimes even to 'surpass' themselves. This re-engagement was often essential, since it acted as a powerful lever for some positive changes of direction, to which they had given little consideration in the past, and caused them also to question their career objectives. The statements we collected also show that they acquired some new skills that may have a significant impact on their approach to work and employment. Self-confidence and communication skills are major assets when it comes to seeking work and many of the young people stated they had succeeded in developing these aspects in the course of their stays.

On a personal level, most participants reported that they perceived a change in themselves. Besides the benefits of discovering a new culture and a new way of life, the young people also mentioned they had begun to learn about otherness. Some said they had learnt to live in a previously unknown group and to respect others. All these are notable effects that were underlined during the interviews.

Positive effects on the coordination of the regional actors

Over and above the organisation of stays abroad, the main purpose of the experimental project



<http://thema.univ-fcomte.fr>

The content of the 'Support for International Mobility' programme

The experimental project comprised several strands:

- 1) Stays abroad were organised for several groups, who also received educational support (linguistic evaluation, acculturation to the destination country, raising awareness of civic values). More specifically, two group stays abroad were organised. One was educational in nature and designed to strengthen the social awareness and sense of citizenship of a group of 21 young people with level IV qualifications and below who had already reached the age of majority. Eight of them were receiving support from the *mission locale* and the remaining 13 were undergoing training in forestry work. The other was an international mobility project designed to improve the sense of citizenship and employability of 9 young people receiving support from the *mission locale*. Sixteen individual projects for young people who did not meet the criteria for the standard international mobility support schemes were also completed successfully.
- 2) A campaign to raise awareness of and to promote international mobility was conducted in conjunction with events promoting apprenticeships, with a particular emphasis on offering young people positive experiences in this area (participation in events, video) and drawing on support from the *Jeunesse* portal.
- 3) Finally, a collaborative platform was set up, dedicated to young people's mobility (PHILEAS) and involving the actors crucial to the success of individual and group projects. Over and above the tools made available (IT portal, guide, documents etc.), the synergy between the actors and the pooling of their expertise should make it possible, adopting the principle of the 'one-stop shop', to plan and implement international mobility projects jointly with young people. This project also benefited from the use of existing facilities (particularly those of the Regional Council of Franche-Comté).

was to develop a tool that would enable the organisations concerned to work together in tackling the problems faced by young people. At the present time, the convergence effects have been partially achieved. Thus the experiment brought numerous organisations closer together and the various local actors and services are now better informed about each other. This effect has gone beyond the single issue of mobility and is now making itself felt in other areas affecting young people. The apprenticeship and international mobility events were the first of their kind and a successful example of working in networks. Moreover, some twenty partners have joined forces around the collaborative portal in order to bring together all the actors involved in international mobility. It is not only the standard programmes that are involved, but also volunteer schemes for young people and international solidarity projects. New partnerships have been forged as a result.

In this respect, the experimental project has unleashed an endogenous dynamic that now has to be nourished and preserved for the long term. The collaborative interactive portal is a tool that can be used to bring together all the actors involved on a lasting basis in order to provide concerted support for youth projects. As a result, the actors have been able to review the issues relating to young people and refocus their energies on promoting mobility.

Creating endogenous development

This experimental project has been a success, in the sense that several actors involved in mobility now have solid experience of working together. The network dynamic must now be maintained. Personalised support, promoting the benefits of mobility and the geolocation of grant holders are among the projects to be pursued. The actors seem to have joined forces in order to maintain what has been created, or even to extend it to the region as a whole and to other problem areas (notably housing).

So-called disadvantaged groups seldom get involved in anything other than locally based projects, unlike university students, for example. In that regard, the approach based

on action taken by local operators was an apposite one that produced a convincing result. The decision by the project initiator to offer YPFOs experience of international mobility also seems to have been a judicious one. Such experience is beneficial, even though the project involved destinations other than neighbouring countries.

With regard to the choice of target population for the project, there is one main observation to be made. In the eyes of the project initiator, adopting level IV qualifications as the maximum qualificational level for inclusion in the project meant that the target population was a homogenous one. However, this is far from being the case: apprentices and secondary school pupils, those with qualifications and those without obviously constitute target groups with very different characteristics and behaviours. It would certainly have been more effective to put in place separate and specific programmes for the various groups and offer projects and destinations suited to each one's specific characteristics, needs and expectations.

Over and above this lesson learnt from experience, this is a result common to many of the projects evaluated by Céreq. The establishment of local partnerships around a shared, consensual project is undeniably an effective way of getting normally compartmentalised local bodies to network with each other. Institutional decompartmentalisation, polarisation, the creation of networks and regional cooperation are now the objects of largely voluntarist policies in all areas, even beyond social affairs. It seems that an endogenous development dynamic can be effectively unleashed by uniting local actors around 'cross-cutting project areas' or 'themes related to local issues' that are to be tackled by adopting approaches appropriate to the types of target groups identified.

The interest groups and partnerships set up on an *ad hoc* basis could, by virtue of the experience they acquire and the expertise they develop, become actors in a system of guidance adapted to the needs of a particular territory. In this way, 'good practice' could be more readily identified, transferred and applied to other territories and/or sets of themes. ■

Further reading

- « Comment répondre à l'immobilité des jeunes ayant moins d'opportunités (JAMO) ? Une illustration d'intelligence territoriale », S. Carel et F. Deloye, DEPP, *Education et Formation*, à paraître en mars 2012.
- L'évaluation qualitative : objectiver sans compter, S. Divay, *Bref* n°286, 2011.
- « Générer de l'innovation sociale : le pari des expérimentations du Haut Commissariat à la jeunesse. Un exemple : dynamique endogène et synergie des acteurs autour de la mobilité des jeunes à Besançon », S. Carel et alii, in *Evaluation et données longitudinales : quelles relations ? XVIII^e journées d'études sur les données longitudinales dans l'analyse du marché du travail*, Marseille, Relief n°30, mai 2010, pp 57-66.
- Sur les projets du Fonds d'expérimentation pour la jeunesse : <http://www.jeunes.gouv.fr/ministere-1001/actions/fonds-d-experimentation-pour-la-1038/>

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