

Key Factors for Success in Initial Vocational Training with Regard to the French Experience Situated in the European Context

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Initial and continuing vocational training is at present in the centre of debates in France and in Europe, for several reasons:

- First of all for demographic reasons: development analysis forecast that until 2010, 7 to 8 million posts would be held by new workforce. The reason is the massive leave for pension of the baby boomer generation and the emergence of new professional profiles, which require training for young people and for people already on labour market. Germany and Spain are confronted to a similar situation.

- The next reason is linked to unemployment: In Europe, there is a high rate of unemployment, notably of young people (16.9% in France, 25.9% in Spain, 11.2% Germany (figures 2001), even though companies often do not find the new qualifications they need for development.

- Finally, because in France, as in Europe in general, vocational training systems are changing. In France, social partners are negotiating agreements that will deeply transform continuing vocational training, while having considerable influence on initial vocational training. Moreover, the setting up of a system for the validation of vocational experience in 2002 has remarkably changed the relation between training, competences and professionalism of young people and workforce in general. Spain is just implementing a law on vocational training, which will completely modify the image of training in that country. Germany is introducing more and more flexibility in the existing "dual system", a development which is closely linked to the new skill needs.

Behind all these realities and changes, the permanent challenge for the different countries is to be able to cope with labour market, qualification and competition development.

France: Background information

France has a population of 60 million and a surface close to the surface of Thailand. In spite of a high level of modernisation, the country still has to deal with a number of social problems. Well known for excellence in several high technology sectors like aerospace, transport, energy, car industry etc., France also succeeded in the modernization of agriculture, a sector that is one of the main sources of income. Moreover, in terms of the number of tourists visiting the country every year, France is placed first worldwide.

French economy, since 1945, has basically passed through 2 main periods:

- 1945- early 1970s: A very fast development. During this period, the so-called "30 glorious years", the economical growth rate in France was one of the highest worldwide.

- In the 1970s, the sudden oil crisis interrupted this growth.

- In the 80ies, after considerable growth between 1986 and 1989, there was a slackening off in 1990, recession in 1993 and then a gradual upturn from 1994 on.

- Since 2000, like in other European countries, French economy has been subject to a slowdown of growth. Nevertheless, due to the demographic development in France (the

highest birth rate, after Ireland) and numerous foreign investments (second place in Europe, after UK), economy is bound for recovery.

The unemployment rate is still high in France (9.1% in 2002, out of which 16.9% young people under 26 years), in spite of a number of measures in favour of young people and long-term unemployed. Apart from that, France is characterized by the fact that the rate of workforce over 55 years is one of the lowest in Europe (35%). During the last months, there were important social movements in reaction to the present debate about the extension professional activity throughout life (41 years in 2008, instead of 40 years in the private sector, and 37.5 years in the public sector).

In the field of education and training, France spends 7% of the GDP for school and 1.55% for vocational training of apprentices and wage earners. This investment places the country in a satisfactory position in the European context. In 2000, the sharing-out of the total of 21.65 million € for continuing vocational training was as follows: 9.3 million € employers, 8.2 million € State, 1.94 million € Regions. One of the distinctive features of the French vocational training system is the fact that the greater part of the costs for training of young people and wage earners is paid by employers.

Foundation of the French education system

In order to understand the French vocational training system and its recent developments, it is necessary to refer to specific social premises in the context of French society.

School - a factor of social equality

This idea has its roots in the French revolution, when Condorcet pronounced his wish for a "universal education, which is equal and continuing for all citizens"; it is the conviction that knowledge will allow establishing a society based on equality, in which the individual is recognized for his qualities, not for social origin. This idea is predominant during the XIX^o century and represents the root for the implementation of the republican, non-religious school accessible to everybody.

School - access to a minimum of common knowledge

This second idea is linked to the first one. The new element it provides is that each young person should enter professional life only if he/she has obtained the basic general knowledge that allows him/her to master successfully the different aspects of personal and professional life. In the French education system, this was realized via the implementation of the "collège unique", which all French pupils must follow. Only after this common root, the French education system provides diversification. The objective is to give everyone the same chance of accessing to knowledge, disregarding the social origin and context. Even if today the "collège unique" is called in question because, according to critics, it doesn't really prepare pupils for vocational training, the importance of giving basic common knowledge to all appears to be a major topic in the context of the present European debate on education and vocational training systems. In fact, the actual question is about the "basic skills" that young people and teachers need, in order to be able to keep pace with the changes in our knowledge society. Knowledge and know-how acquisition necessary in order to be able to cope with the constantly changing world, is a challenge for both youth and adults. Today, the central question in the context of initial and continuing vocational training is how to provide a system able to respond to "life-long learning" needs, adapted to the rhythm of development and the requirements of their professional life.

Social partnerships – their role in the field of vocational training and qualifications

It is almost impossible to understand the situation of French vocational training without knowing the indispensable role of negotiation between employers and trade unions.

Even though the field of initial vocational training is under the responsibility of the authorities, it is actually situated in the global framework of agreement between the social partners (1971), and was subsequently integrated in law by the authorities. The consequence of this law was the structuring of continuing vocational training in companies, the reinforcement of training by apprenticeship and the implementation of a funding system for continuing training in companies, alternance training (cooperative training) and retraining.

Since 1971, several agreements enclosed in this law led to a modification of vocational training in France. Measures such as the obligation for negotiation concerning vocational training (1984), the implementation of contracts for the reintegration through alternance training (1983 and 1991), the creation of joint commissions for the collecting of funds or OPCA or the account of training time.

At present, there is an important negotiation, which should lead to an agreement in autumn. It deals with the implementation of an individual “bank of training time” and the concrete measures to be implemented in favour of life-long learning during and off working hours. Another particularly important project for the future of vocational education presently discussed is the “postponed” initial vocational training. The idea is to include in young people’s qualifications, once a specific qualification level attained, the possibility to enter working life, while still keeping the right to continue training and to obtain a higher qualification any time they wish, in order to progress professionally speaking.

It should be reminded that the social partners are essential actors in initial vocational training, in so far as they participate by right in the drafting and updating of vocational training contents, in the context of the advisory joint commission assisting the Ministry of Education. For reintegration training in the context alternance training they define in joint sector specific, national commissions, the qualifications that justify the implementation of a specific training course.

Important changes in the French vocational training system

The present French initial vocational training system is subject to perpetual modification. In recent days, the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training has identified seven fields that should be accomplished in the near future. Here are some examples:

- A better balance of education contents (more technological and vocational aspects in general education and reinforcement of general education in the context of vocational training)
- The proposal of better diversification of pathways at the end of college education, more information and orientation measures in order to put vocational training at the same level as general education
- Promotion of the “lycée des métiers”, a vocational secondary school, i.e. establishments of excellence, where school education, training by apprenticeship, continuing training for adults, validation of vocational experience etc. are under one roof.

The fields to be developed show that vocational training has not yet acquired the image it deserves and that, when people choose this path, it is still far too often just because they have failed in general education.

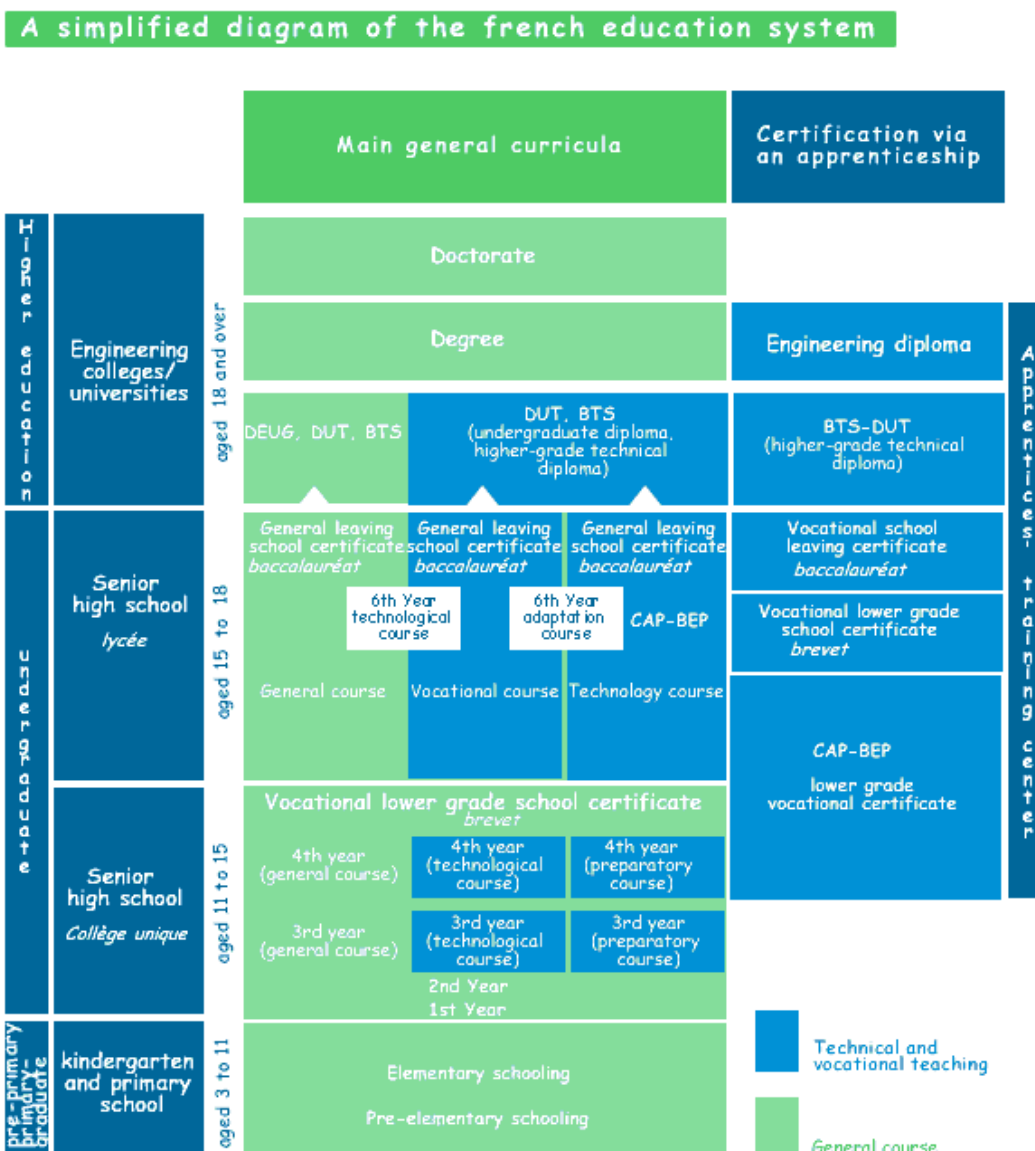
The changes realized in the last 20 years are based on **a triangle of possible concepts for the success of vocational training: a system conceived in view of advancement towards higher qualifications, structured in the context of alternance training and partnerships between school and industry, and a system at once decentralized and**

global, focussing on life-long learning. Around this triangle of concepts, France, little by little, developed improved pathways and defined factors of success and efficiency of initial vocational training.

Some basic facts about the French system of initial vocational training

Initial vocational training (IVT) is composed of education and training leading to a skilled worker diploma (Certificat d'Aptitude Professionnelle or CAP and Brevet d'Enseignement professionnel or BEP), to a technician diploma (baccalauréat professionnel) and, by extension, to job oriented higher education (brevet de technicien supérieur - BTS or diplôme universitaire de technologie - DUT and, recently, to the “licence professionnelle”.

The following diagram gives an idea about the structure of IVT in the context of general education.



In 2001, basic figures concerning secondary education were as follows:

- Accomplishment of IVT on the level of skilled worker (CAP, BEP): 382.700
- Accomplishment of the baccalauréat professionnel (technician): 88.500
- Accomplishment of baccalauréats on the whole: 475.480
- Leavers without diploma: 150.000, out of which 60.000 with no qualification at all

The total number shows that, in secondary education, there are more leavers with diploma in the field of vocational education (471.200) than in general education (387.000). In higher education, the proportion is about the same. In 2000, 124.770 students achieved a BTS or a DUT, whereas 124.770 obtained an under-graduate diploma in the field of general education. To sum up, more than a half of young people of one age group enter labour market after having completed a vocational training course as skilled worker, technician and undergraduate technician.

The professional baccalauréat: ways and means for the structuring of a vocational education system oriented towards higher qualification

Until 1985, the French vocational training system was composed of two main courses: first a school course in technical colleges (CET) leading to CAP (skilled worker diploma). Secondly, a course by apprenticeship, given in apprentice training centres (CFA) and leading, thanks to training organized in an apprenticeship system under work contract, to the same diplomas as the school courses.

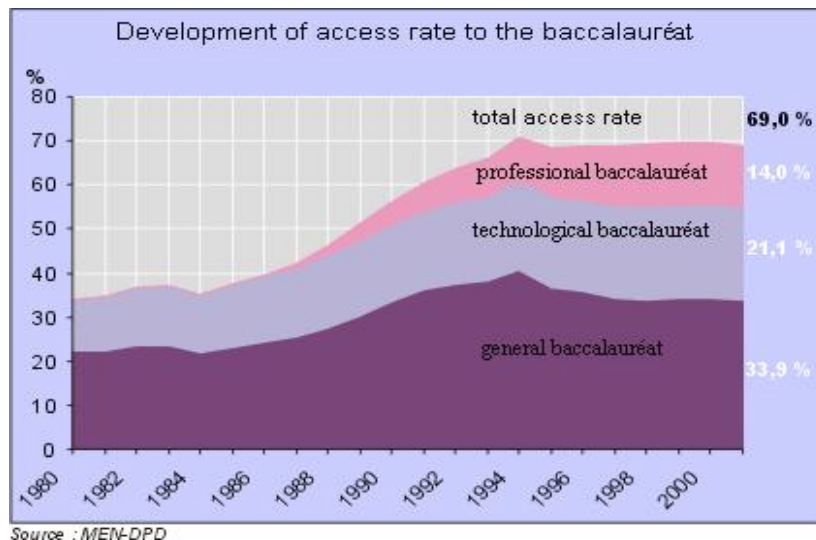
1985 was a year of major modification of the French vocational training system, due to the fact that the professional baccalauréat was implemented. This important measure testifies to the awareness and will for important changes:

- First of all, it was the result of consensus between public authorities and social partners: the necessity of better knowledge and competences of young entrants in a labour market, which turned out to be increasingly shaped by technological development and organizational change in companies. More a premonition than a concrete idea, the aim was to catch up with the developments towards a society of intelligence and knowledge.

- Secondly, there was a very strong political will, both on the side of public authorities and of social partners, of giving vocational training a reputation comparable to the image of general education. This will was reinforced by the fact that, at this time, the entrance in vocational training was overwhelmingly characterized by failure selection and 30% of one age group entered labour market with no qualification at all.

- Finally, it was the first time that a real vocational training course was established. Before, that kind of training stopped at "skilled worker" level. The technicians (BTS) who, at that time, came from upper secondary education (lycée) or from university, had imperatively to go through general or technological education. The baccalauréat professionnel was a pathway for promotion and a means to put an end to the former situation of vocational training which, in fact, was a blind alley, a dead end. From now on, it was not only possible to switch from CAP to BTS, even the perspective of an entire university education was in prospect.

The present figures available, almost 20 years after the implementation of the baccalauréat professionnel - "bacc pro" , testify to the important effects it had on the French education and training system. On one hand, this new course allowed an increase of the number of pupils accomplishing the second level of initial education, a situation that has become one of the most important benchmarks of educational success, as fixed by the Lisbon summit.



On the other hand, the “bacc pro” provided the possibility of getting a qualification that allows direct access to labour market, while still keeping the right for access to the BTS and even to get enrolled in regular studies at the university. The conclusion that can be drawn from these facts is that vocational training, without perspectives of actually accessing to higher education, represents a discredit and doesn't lead to the level of vocational qualifications that are required in our knowledge society.

Partnership between education establishments and industry, or the progressively implemented logic of qualifications and integration with the help of alternance training and the validation of vocational experience

Since the beginning of the XX^o century, the French system has been used to apprenticeship and partnership with companies. The creation of the baccalauréat professionnel coincided with the implementation of a systematic network of schools and enterprises. Several measures have since then completed this network.

- From 1985 on, the implementation of the baccalauréat professionnel was accompanied by an important operation of partnership building between schools and companies, in order to enhance the value of work and vocational competence in the context of the national education system. Somehow, the aim was to overcome the suspicion that existed between the world of education and the world of industry. School was to be brought to real knowledge about what industry and services really were. This action was mainly symbolic, but still, it has somewhat reconciled two worlds up to there separated.

- The law of July 1987, implementing the alternance training system from college up to engineering school, has given school/company partnerships a new value. Companies became the natural and established partners of the vocational training system and, consequently, a possible place for apprenticeship and the acquisition of future key competences. Following the example of the baccalauréat professionnel, it has given a new value to vocational training as a whole, by implementing for pupils, who before were limited in terms of promotion and obliged to enter labour market immediately, the possibility to achieve the highest level of vocational qualifications. It was the first time that the French education system offered that possibility.

- All these measures in order to promote alternance training and school/company relations have entailed **the progressive implementation of traineeships in companies for all kinds of vocational training**. Thus, in education courses whose main objective was to continue studies (some of the BEP), training periods of 3 to 5 weeks were implemented,

whereas training courses aimed at the integration in labour market (BEP, CAP, Bacc pro) have seen the integration of training periods in companies or professional life of 5 to 18 weeks. Today, in France there is no vocational training course with a minimum of training in companies. These periods or traineeships, which are an integral part of the course, allow students to clarify their professional project and, above all, to acquire the basic competences in relation with their qualification. This generalization of alternance training in companies has recently entailed the implementation of coordination units in schools, charged with the reinforcement of partnerships with industry and the different professional sectors, as well as the development of a better integration of the existing vocational training courses, adapted to the development of the professional world.

- The development of alternance training coincided, on State level (Ministry of Education and Vocational Training), with the implementation of **training measures based on alternance contracts, conceived for the integration of young people between 16 and 25 years**. The aim was, in fact, to fight against unemployment of young people and their lack of qualifications when leaving school, as well as to provide a chance for integration into labour market. These measures, agreed by the social partners at the beginning of the 80ies and reshaped in the middle of the 90ies, are still in force. They deal with guidance contracts (integration of young people without diploma and having great difficulties), qualification contracts (young people completing their initial education with vocational training adapted to the needs of labour market), and finally adaptation contracts (young unemployed who need to adapt to a specific post).

- The consequence of this dynamic situation promoting the value of professional competence acquisition in companies was, in January 2002, the law on social modernization, which regulates the fact that any diploma or ratified qualification can be obtained through the **validation of professional experience**. This legislative measure, which represents a genuine revolution, on cognitive and social level, in the French approach to the value of initial education, is on the way of being implemented by the different operators. It will certainly entail greater appreciation of efficiency and pertinence of certain initial training courses.

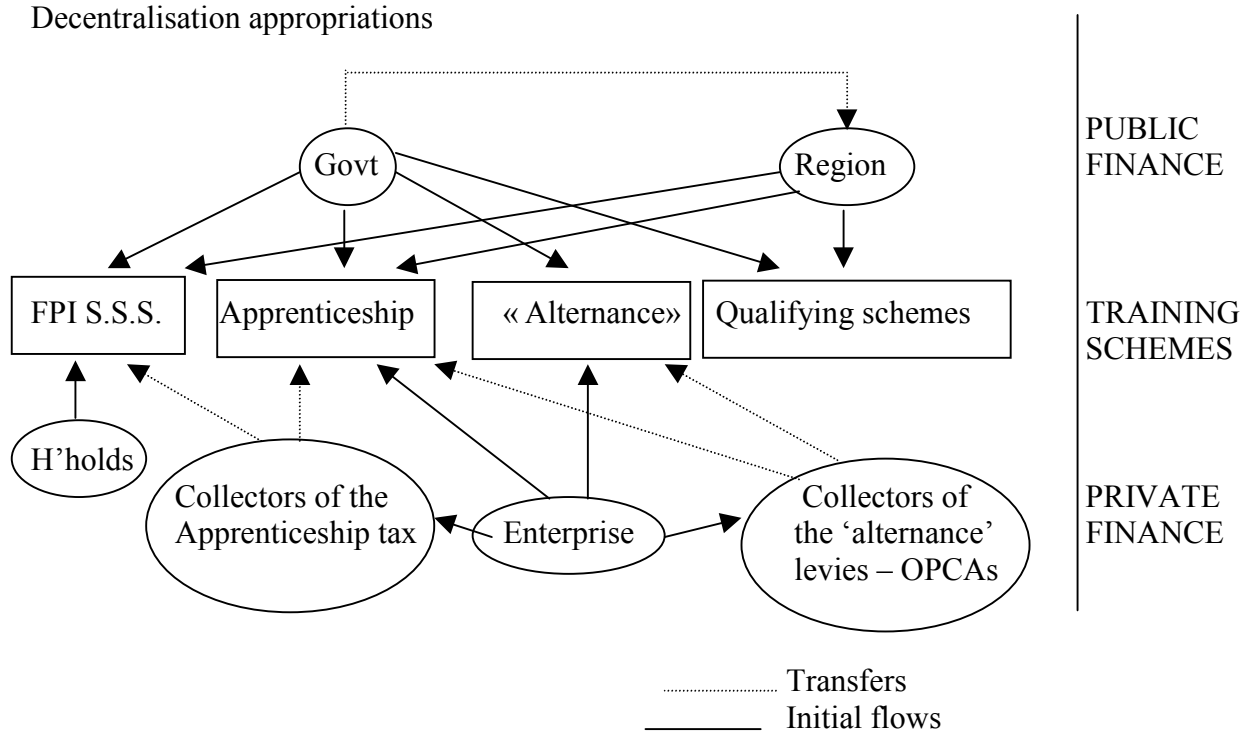
Progressive decentralization in order to face the problems of training and qualifications globally

The first law about decentralization in France (March 1982 and July 1983) allocated the regions direct competences in the field of continuing vocational training and apprenticeship. The regional councils, together with the State and the social partners, have the power of coordinating and structuring the offer of initial and continuing vocational training for young people of 16-25 years, and of vocational training measures for adults. This transfer of competences has been accompanied by the handing over of appropriate financial means (decentralization grants, tax system transferred to the regions).

This first law has been completed by the five-year government/regional planning agreement of December 1993. It implemented plans for regional development in the field of vocational training of young people, this time concerning the entire training courses for young people preparing access to employment: initial training (school and apprenticeship), alternance training integration contracts, continuing vocational training. The law has foreseen application conventions between State and regions in order to assure coherence between the actions of one and the other party, and to assure the funding of the accepted programmes.

General flow of funding

Decentralisation appropriations



FPI S.S.S. : Initial vocational training at school

In 2003, a new law is being prepared. It plans for the State to keep its regulatory functions concerning the definition of the contents of training courses, recruitment and the management of teaching personnel, as well as the definition and the issuing of diplomas. The regions, in coordination with the State and the social partners, take all the other responsibilities (map of the regions providing vocational training, orientation and information, life-long learning and, of course, questions related to investments and maintenance).

The present evaluation of the policy implemented by several regions shows that this decentralisation has various very important consequences on the implementation and efficiency of initial vocational training:

- It allows to better locate the global training offer in relation to the economical and social development and thus, to reinforce the adequacy of initial vocational training with company's skills and employment needs.

- It has the effect of an individualized approach to information-, orientation- and follow-up services and is more efficient in the field of integration in working life.

- It makes it impossible to dissociate the different training paths (school, apprenticeship, life-long learning...) and the beneficiary public (young and adults, job seekers, wage-earners...) and calls for a change of services provided by the present training institutions. In fact, passing from mono-services institutions to a platform of services turned towards life-long learning possibilities for all public is at stake.

- It creates, on regional level, structures und means which allow the management of vocational training to be much closer to the needs of economic development and labour market.

On structural level:

The regions' competences in the field of vocational training and apprenticeship require an annual debate of each regional council concerning the regional programme of vocational training and apprenticeship. This programme defines the regional orientation which, at national level, is coordinated by a national committee for the coordination of regional programmes.

The regional programme gives rise to a regional plan of development of vocational training for young and adults, elaborated in cooperation with the regional coordination committee of employment and training. This committee consists of regional and national representatives and social partners. The plan determines the overall initial and continuing training measures for young people, as well as the information and guidance activities to be implemented. The aim is to gather all training measures to be implemented by the different regional establishments in one coherent plan.

On means level:

The responsibilities of territorial bodies in the context of decentralization, concern the construction and maintenance of buildings for education and training establishments (towns and the department for primary schools and colleges, regions for secondary education and vocational training establishments).

- The new law on decentralization presently prepared should be put into practice soon, deals with the autonomy of establishments. It is too early to give precise information about what this autonomy will consist of, so much the more as the national debate aims to maintain a very dynamic relation between the national and the increasingly European approach to content and diploma definition, and the actual offer provided by establishments, responding to local qualification and employment needs.

Key factors for success in ITV in regard to the French experience situated in the European development

The French experience, even if particular from an historical point of view, the actors and the specific political and institutional situation, is still located in a European environment which is characterized by the diversity of national situations, but at the same time by common strategies and work programmes. Any consideration concerning success factors of vocational training must take into account the whole environment, in order to get a sensible idea of the factors that allow this training policy to achieve the best results. It must also take into account the orientation of the European Council in Lisbon, which fixed the strategic objectives for Europe until 2010, namely to become "the most competitive and dynamic knowledge based economy in the world". The European Commission translated this objective into performance indicators, so-called benchmarks, to be identified in six fields, out of which five are concerning vocational training: the level of investment in education and training, the rate of early school-leavers, the rate of young people having completed secondary education, acquisition of key competences and the implementation of life-long learning measures. In all these fields, the Commission has fixed the objectives to be attained until 2010: not more than 10% of school leavers without diploma or qualifications; 80% of the work force between 25 and 64 years should have successfully completed secondary education; provide access to life-long learning for at least 15% of this population.

These European objectives correspond more or less, if not exactly, to the philosophy of other developed economies. Considering the French example of creating a more efficient system compared to some other European countries, we can identify a certain number of common policies implemented and objective factors necessary in order to reach the objectives, which can be summarized as follows:

1. **To implement an open initial vocational training system**, i.e. with real inter-links between general education and university education, that should really integrate and enhance the value of the professional dimension. This French situation is confirmed by similar developments in Germany (extension of the dual system in the context of "second chance" schools, which allow former apprentices, via part-time or full-time training, to enter university or engineering schools) and in Spain, which recently adopted a law on general orientation of secondary education. This openness of ITV is an essential condition for the realization of major objectives: to provide training for young people according to economic and social needs, and to assure for 80% of the work-force to have completed at least secondary education.

2. **To assure that any young person or adult is given the basic knowledge** necessary for their development in personal and professional life. Nowadays, any society is confronted to the question of giving a minimum of knowledge/know-how to its workforce, in order to assure mobility and adaptability to present and future developments. This minimum level must be guaranteed throughout vocational training. Today, more than ever, it should also provide for an intercultural and international dimension.

3. **To develop alternance training jobs**. The generalization of this type of training is not only a French reality, but a dimension presently developed in the Spanish and, recently, in the Italian system. This development requires further thought concerning the means of development, evaluation and certification of competences acquired during training in the alternance system, and details about how vocational experience should be taken into consideration.

4. **To globally consider the problems of initial and continuing training** and to set up a platform of education and training services integrating both of them in an accessible and diversified offer. European considerations and orientation towards life-long learning require an increasingly global approach to education and training. The new Spanish law, for example, has integrated initial training, continuing training and integration measures in one single system. The present project in France, namely the "lycée des métiers", is following the same logic. It intends to offer the possibility to obtain identical diploma through either initial and continuing training, apprenticeship or the validation of vocational experience. That means that life-long learning should be implemented as a system of initial training, divided into different training periods, an idea that has become subject to concerted debates in several European countries.

5. **A clear approach**, with the help of decentralization, between needs of employment and qualification needs in one region, and a national system able to guarantee transparency and quality of qualifications and their legibility on national and international level. The relation between local and global approach must be introduced in training systems, which, very often, are still rather centralized or too much adapted to specific local requirements.

6. The last success factor deals with the **permanent adaptation to education and training needs** through the implementation of partnerships between central authorities, local authorities and social partners. Almost all the vocational training systems in Europe are based on a double structure of decentralization and social democracy. This structure can be qualified as follows:

- Transfer of vocational training competences to the regions or autonomous communities
- Local partnerships between social partners and industry, in order to develop a estimated training offer, corresponding to the economic and social middle- and long term development.

- State/Region partnerships, a guaranty for a national approach of qualification- and certification problems. In this context, social partners have an essential role in the defining and up-dating of the global training offer in relation to the economic and social development
- The implementation of a national qualification system, sometimes centralized and homogeneous, often characterized by diversity and the fundamental rules of transparency, legibility and accessibility to the recognized qualifications.
- A more and more multiple approach to qualifications, integrating the different training courses and increasingly, the validation of skills by experience.

This multi-partners approach is not an exclusive model to be developed at all costs, it is just the observation that no training or qualification system will work without the integration of the legitimate and clearly identified political, economical and social partners. This identification and legitimacy represent a vital factor in any system.

Conclusion

The greater part of the analyses and thoughts of mine are torn from professional experience in France and Europe, as well as from systematic studies on factors of success presently discussed in the different countries. It is not about theorization on systems and situations, but a dynamic apprehension of reality, as far as I could follow its development. This dynamic approach shows that the problem of a more autonomous management of training establishments is only one of the elements in the debate about success and efficiency of vocational training systems. Another question, that is increasingly discussed, deals with the capacity of training establishments to follow a coordinated strategy: on regional and national level, implemented by political, economic and social actors, aiming at a better integration of the different qualification paths for young people and adults: initial and continuing training, apprenticeship and alternance training, qualification through formal education and through the validation of vocational experience. The conversion of these establishments into integrated training centres in a national and international environment is at stake, the development of coordinated and, in cooperation with all the actors concerned, well managed autonomy.

I hope that these considerations will be useful and, above all, might entail a better synergy of our multiple thoughts, situations and actions, in order to help vocational training to become a path of success in all our countries.