

## Australia, France and the United Kingdom: helping youth into the labour market - a community responsibility to maintain social cohesion?

In France, as in most Western countries, getting a job is a real challenge for young people. It's a transition period in which the state has always been urged to play an active role. The notion of youth has traditionally been linked with this notion of transition; a transition from a state to another, from school to work or from assistance to responsibility for instance. This correlation has been criticised, seen as reductive of what youth is, and has been qualified but it remains a central issue when analysing topics related to youth.

Approaches to youth have evolved together with changing economic conditions. With the 1970s crisis, professional stabilisation was no longer quick but was seen as the conclusion of a long process so that the 1980s saw the popularisation of the theory of the extension of youth.

However the idea of extension still implied that the process would one day be completed - even if it took longer than previously expected- and that is now being questioned, as there no longer is a linear succession of the different stages of the life cycle. Today, the latter is characterised by the complexity and the reversibility of situations (uncertainty of employment, overlapping of different forms of employment, experience of various forms of family life and modes of socialisation, reversibility of social status).

Thus, in France for researchers like De Singly, the term "adult" has to be redefined, as they consider it is too tightly understood as access to employment or to parenthood so that according to this analysis the notion of "access to autonomy" should be substituted to the notion of "access to adulthood". An adult is an individual whose prime characteristics are to be "independent"- who must have the economic resources necessary to be self-sufficient. Autonomy implies that you have the necessary resources to create a space of your own.

Quite paradoxically this financial independence is linked to social inclusion: On the one hand, financial independence achieved in contradiction to social rules is disregarded and analysed as threatening to social cohesion. On the other hand, being excluded from society threatens one's chances to achieve economic autonomy -so that financial independence and social cohesion are two intertwined concepts. Being labelled as a category "at risk", young people are at the centre of this inclusion/ Exclusion debate. This paper will focus on the reciprocal links between young people and the wider community, in three countries, France, Australia and the United Kingdom.

The label attached to young people will be the focal point of the first part of this paper. It will also centre on how this categorisation has shaped policies targeting young people, and more precisely welfare to work programmes. When, in the late 1990s, new governments were elected in those three countries, they all launched new employment programmes specifically targeting young people. The programmes are informative of the extent to which young people were seen as a threat to social cohesion and might reveal different categorisations of young people.

Differences in the level of intervention chosen to facilitate social inclusion will be analysed in the second part of this paper. Who will help young people achieve independence? Who will encourage this process of social inclusion? Should it be the state, the local community, or the family?

## PART I: Social cohesion and employment: an active role for young people?

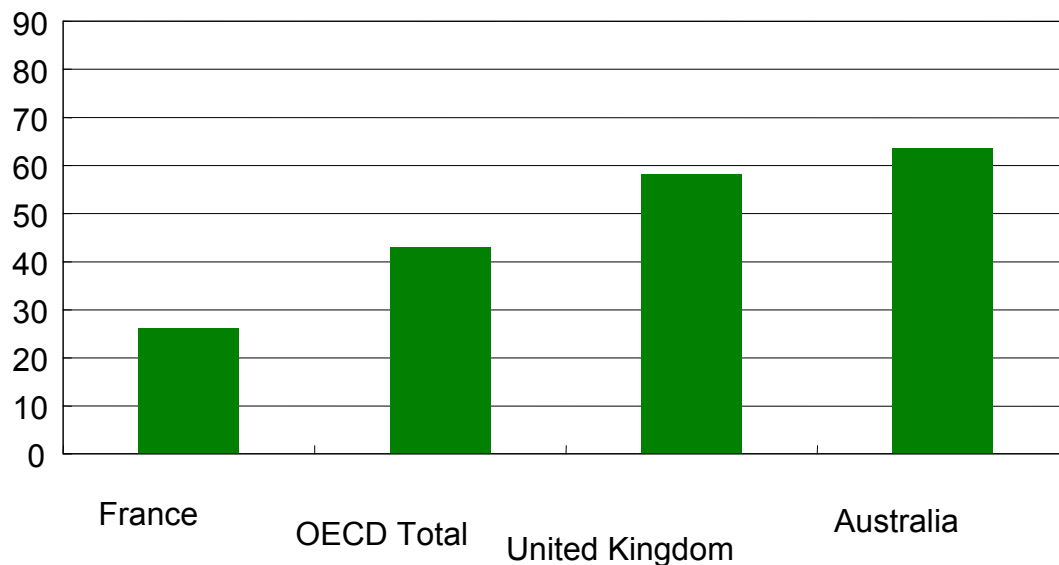
### A) Balance between work and education and its influence on welfare to work programmes

#### 1) An important dimension to understand employment rates

Youth has always been a difficult concept to come to terms with, and particularly as it has always been seen as a non-homogenous group. The programmes built for young people depend on the government's understanding of this group.

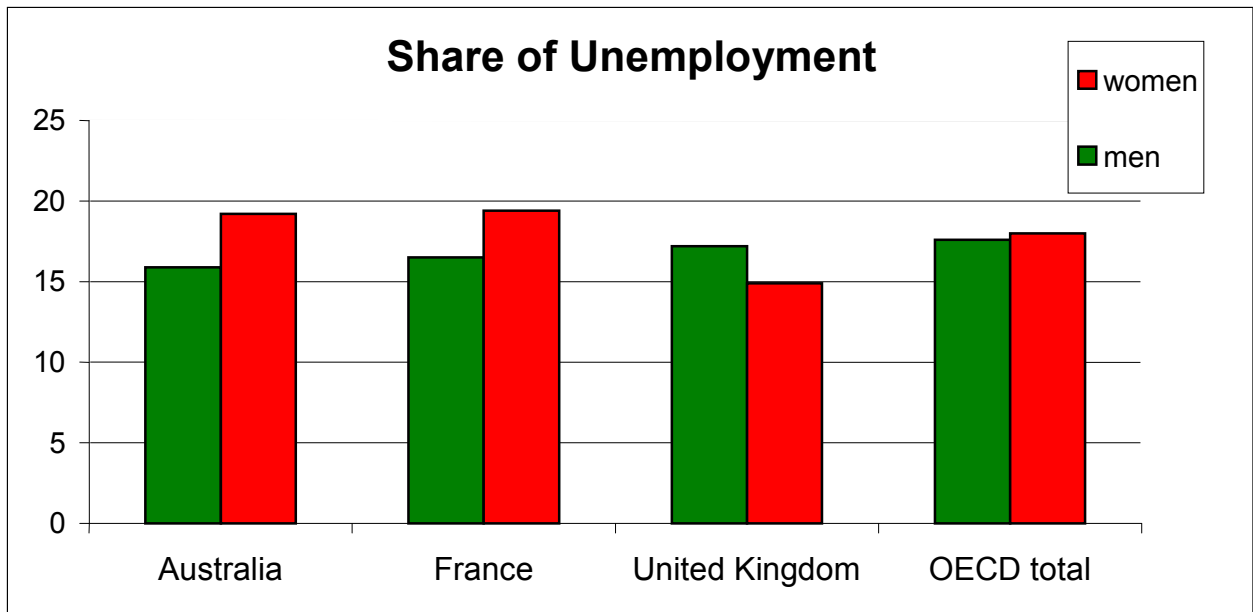
It first appears necessary to see whom employment programmes in the three countries might concern. At first glance, If one compares the employment rates in the three countries (France:26, OECD Total:42.9, United Kingdom, 58.1, Australia 63.6) the situation in France appears much more worrying than in the United Kingdom or in Australia.

### Employment rates for age group 15-24



OECD Factbook 2007: Economic, Environmental and Social Statistics - ISBN 92-64-02946-X -  
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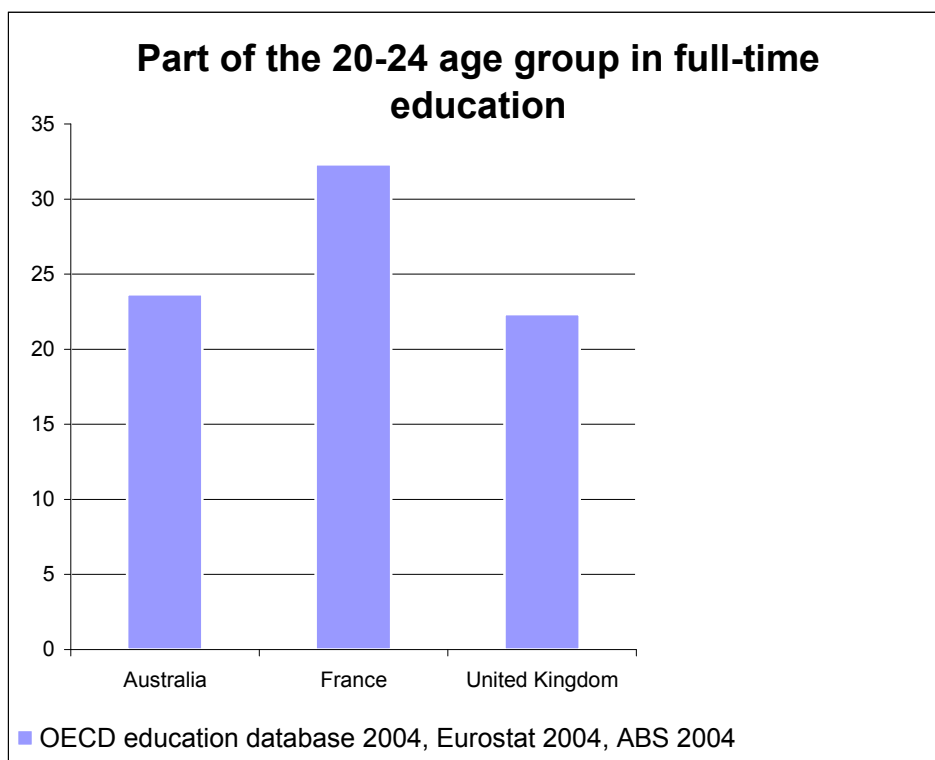
As France has a very high unemployment rate compared to the United Kingdom and Australia, it is also important to put this in perspective to be able to allow comparison between the three countries.



Source: OECD Employment and Labour Market Statistics LFS by sex and age - indicators Vol 2006 release 01 - LFS

As the unemployment rate is higher in France than in the UK or in Australia, it is to be expected that a larger share of young adults will be unemployed in France. We can here see that the share of young adults in the total unemployed population is similar in the three countries.

Besides, in France, young people are expected to continue their studies long after compulsory schooling. Compared to the United Kingdom and Australia an important proportion of young adults remain within the educative system in France:



The percentage of young adults in education is nearly 10 points higher in France than in Australia and the UK. Much more than in Australia or in the UK young adults are expected to pursue some kind of tertiary education. Governments in the UK and in Australia have emphasised the importance of further education but the means attributed to this sector were quite different. For instance, the creation of the youth allowance in Australia was meant to encourage further education as the amount of the allowance was the same for those looking for a job and those remaining in education, but enrolment fees remained high.

## 2) An important dimension to understand the objectives of welfare to work programmes

The part played by post-compulsory education is central in understanding how employment programmes for young people are targeted. Ten years ago, in France a programme - discontinued since- called les *Nouveaux Services-Emplois Jeunes* was launched. In fact, it concerned young people with a university education unable to find a job. This programme was presented as a cornerstone of support for young people, but it concerned only one specific quite privileged category of young people, it often guaranteed them a job for the five years to follow. In his introductory speech, the then Prime Minister Lionel Jospin, had clearly emphasised the importance of giving young people a chance stating that employment had to benefit young people first and questioning the future of a society when its children could not find a job after completing their education. (*“L'emploi doit surtout bénéficier aux jeunes. Quel avenir se donne une société lorsque ses enfants ne peuvent s'insérer dans la vie professionnelle après leur scolarité<sup>1</sup> !”*)

The approach was thus extremely different from that of the UK and Australia. In those two countries, young people were chosen as the target group to experiment welfare to work programmes, programmes that were later extended to the other categories of jobseekers. The programmes were about activating job search on a compulsory basis contrary to the French system; France being an insurance-based system, few young people have access to unemployment benefits. The Revenu Minimum d'Insertion, the social assistance benefit is only accessible once you are 25, so the framework for policy setting is different.

### B) Balance between asset and threat and its influence on welfare to work programmes

#### 1) Importance given to young people

The government vision of young people will thus foster a certain type of policies. Are young people seen a threat to the cohesion of the community? In the Australian programme, work for the dole, there definitely is a behavioural approach to unemployment. The Prime minister implied that not enough had been asked from young people:

“Well, we are, at the moment, focussing on young people. But it's an opportunity to say that we have introduced a work-for-the-dole scheme and that work-for-the-dole scheme is based on the principle that if you provide support for people who can't get work then you've got a right to ask them to do some work in return for that support. If they're not willing to do it, well their dole is at risk<sup>2</sup>.”

On the British side, the vision seems more balanced. The New Deal for Young People is presented as deprived of a “fifth option of life on full benefit”, claimants have to do something in exchange for their benefits, but the options were different from those under the

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<sup>1</sup> JOSPIN, Lionel, ( 1997) introductory speech

<sup>2</sup> HOWARD, John (1998), interview with Stan Zemanek, Radio 2UE

Australian mutual obligation system. Young people are provided with some form of training, the development of skills is more important than in Work for the Dole- Mal Brough even saying, that work for the dole was not an employment programme but there to give you a work ethic:

While Work for the Dole is a work experience program, not an employment programme, it helps to create a culture of employment and a work ethic<sup>3</sup>.

While in Australia, young people, because of the distribution of responsibilities between the federal and state government –in which education is the responsibility of state governments- are not a central feature of federal election campaigns, they held a central part in the 1997 British Labour Party manifesto.

We will give 250,000 under-25s opportunities for work, education and training. Four options will be on offer, each involving day-release education or training leading to a qualification:

private-sector job: employers will be offered a 60 pound-a-week rebate for six months

work with a non-profit voluntary sector employer, paying a weekly wage, equivalent to benefit plus a fixed sum for six months

full-time study for young people without qualifications on an approved course

a job with the environment taskforce, linked to Labour's citizens' service programme. Rights and responsibilities must go hand in hand, without a fifth option<sup>4</sup>.

Rights and responsibilities are thus emphasised but they go together with education and training. The image of young people as a threat to the community has nevertheless been conveyed by the implementation of anti-social behaviour orders that reinforce the image of youth as a threat, as the majority of ASBOS concern young people. ASBOS are civil orders that for instance prevent young people from being in the streets where they have previously misbehaved.

In France, under the right wing government, the image of young people has been increasingly suggesting that they were a potential threat to society. The current President then Home Office secretary referring to some of them as scum, then the riots of autumn 2005 were seen as a movement of young people willingly excluded from mainstream society. Faced with the youth discontent, the right wing government which had abandoned the *Nouveaux Services - Emplois Jeunes* programme, tried to launch the project of apprenticeship from the age of 14.....

## 2) Helping the community as an objective of the programmes

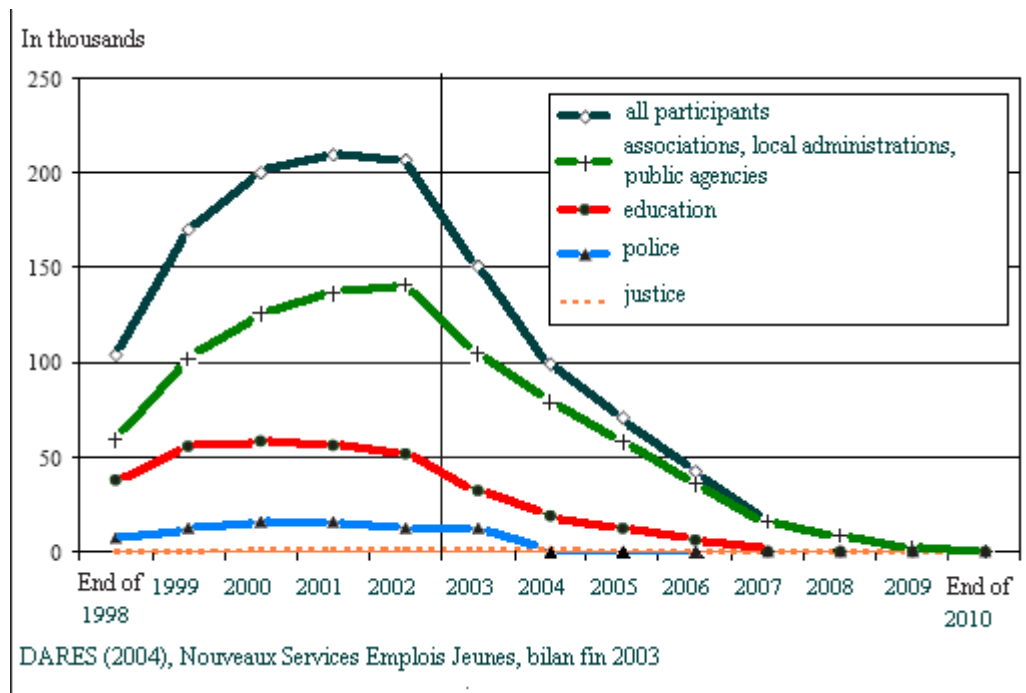
This is feature common to the three programmes. Participants have to be useful to the community. The French programme was supposed to help create jobs linked to new needs, to create new services while giving young people the opportunity to develop their skills. Placements were in three main areas: the education department and the police and local organisations. The places were then clearly in the public and not for profit sector for the benefit of the community.

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<sup>3</sup> Mal Brough (2002), Media Release- Work for the Dole - A Pathway off Welfare

<sup>4</sup> Labour Party Manifesto 1997

## *Destination of participants in the French Programmes*



In Australia, If the tasks asked from participants to the work for the dole programme do not necessarily imply the development of skills, they are often linked to the enhancement of the wellbeing of the community: young jobseekers can have to undertake activities including charity work, the restoration of parks or public buildings... In the United Kingdom this aspect is evidenced by the environmental taskforce even if this option is not the most popular one.

So that young people looking for a job are obviously expected to be involved in activities benefiting the community. But is the community in turn involved in helping young people find a job, or is this the task of other actors ?

## PART II: Employment and social cohesion for young people, whose responsibility?

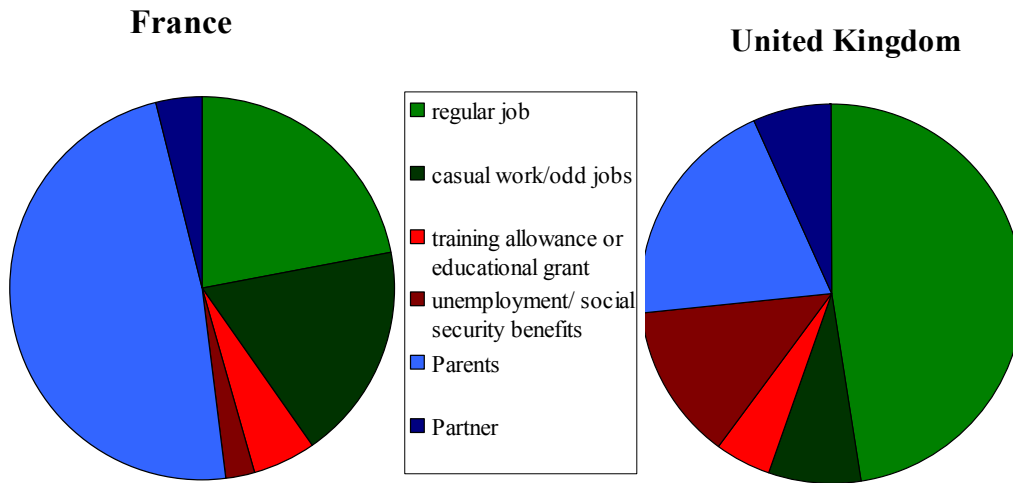
C) Determining the role of the different actors: the state, the family, the community

1) The importance of national social security systems

As said before, the French system of social protection is insurance based. This means that in order to claim unemployment benefits young people have to have worked at least 6 months over the previous 22 months. Besides, access to the social assistance payment is only made possible for those above 25. There is no such age or work requirement in the United Kingdom or in Australia. And these different situations help understand another one, the heavy reliance on the family: 61% of French young people rely on their families compared with only 21% of the British and 33% of Australian young people, so that autonomy and youth are almost contradictory terms as far as French youth is concerned

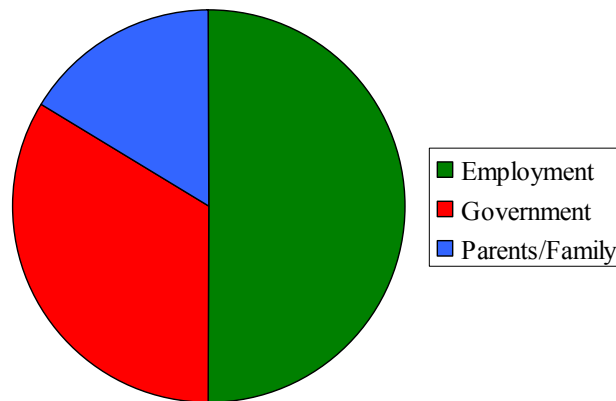
More than the government, families are seen as the main providers of the tools

### Main Source of income for the 15-24 year olds



Eurobarometer (2001), Young Europeans in 2001.

### Australia



Mission Australia, national survey of young Australians, 2005

necessary for a successful social integration. The role of the government is visibly less important than in the United Kingdom and Australia. A distinctive feature is that in France, welfare to work programmes are often subsidised employment or apprenticeships, so that young people on these schemes might not have clearly acknowledged the role of the government in their answers. In 2005, 726 000 young French people benefited from such schemes. It obviously is a very different choice from Australia where subsidised employment is only a marginal feature of welfare to work programmes and does not concern young people as this approach is seen as leading to unfair competition for those not benefiting from the scheme. The French programme also differs from the British New Deal For Young people where, even when jobseekers are orientated towards the employment option, the in-work experience is much shorter.

## 2) Transferability of concepts: the term “community” in French

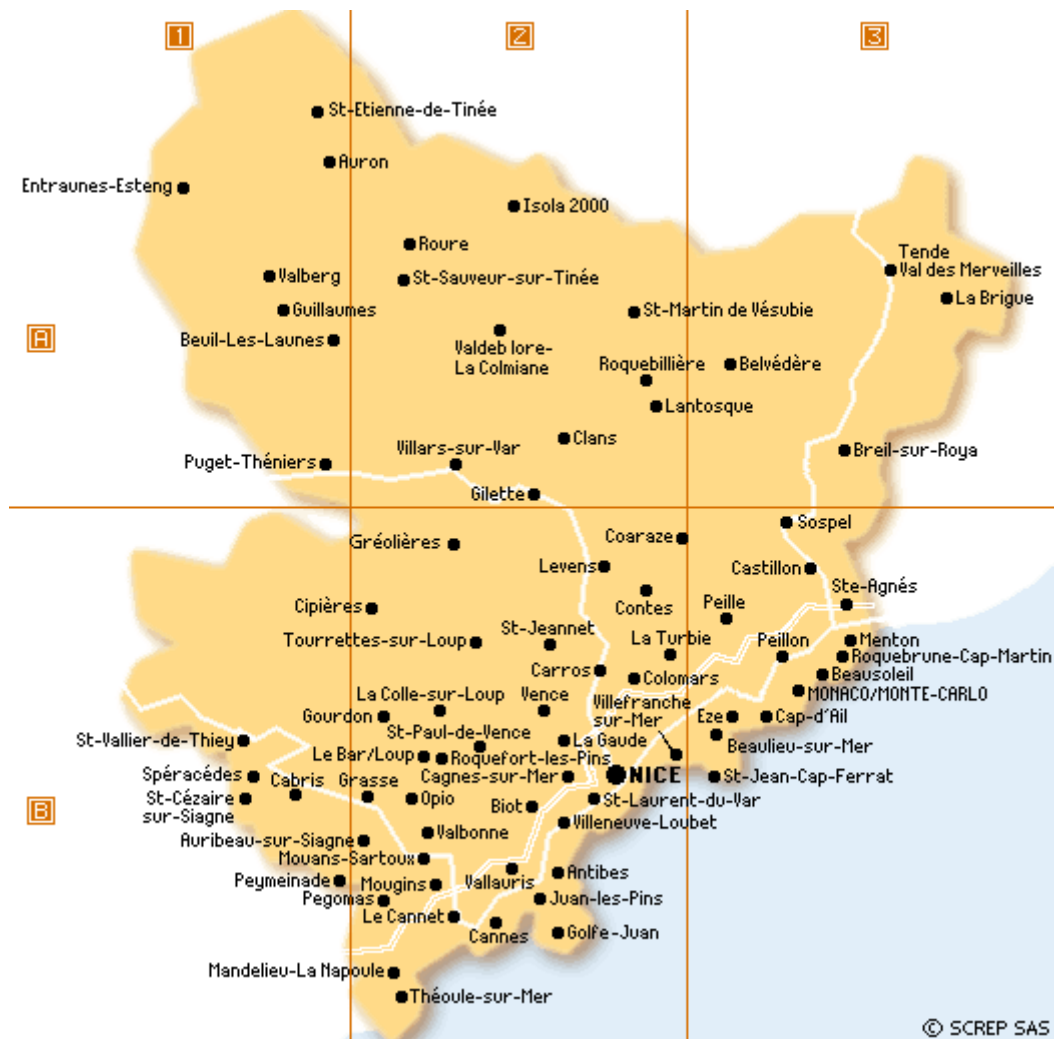
So we have briefly seen the role of the family and the government. But, one is faced with a difficulty when comparing the three countries and attempting to define the role of the community. In the UK and in Australia, the term community has a positive connotation, is widely used as such in the political discourse, as illustrated by the existence in the UK of the Department for communities or in Australia with the department of Family and community services. When looking for the French translation for community in the dictionary, you’ll find the term *communauté*, and if you compare the definitions of those two terms in the Oxford English Dictionary and in the French reference dictionary you’ll find equivalent definitions so that you might think that you can use the terms interchangeably. Nevertheless, *communauté* does not share this popularity; it is in fact connoted negatively. The image conveyed by the term is that of a closed group, at risk of being excluded, isolated. The French term *communautarisme* illustrates this negative connotation: It is a critical reference to the British model, often seen as a collection of communities not really trying to get involved in the broader social life. With the French revolution in 1789, the local realities were deemed less important than the national administration of the country, fostering a sense of citizenship as unitary and national concept, but there has for 2 decades been a trend to “decentralise” powers to the local level, so that even if the term community cannot really be used as far as France is concerned, the question of the role of local institutions is still raised.

### D) Areas of potential involvement

#### 1) Placing young jobseekers

Generally speaking, the local dimension seems increasingly favoured to a national level of intervention. The “local” seems the most relevant intervention level. If in the United Kingdom, the new Deal for young people undoubtedly is a national programme, the implementation of the programmes is more and more outsourced to local associations through pilot programmes. In Australia, the privatisation of the job network also led to a greater role of community services, and of the not for profit sector, with the public agencies quickly disappearing from the list of job network providers. In France, as many young people have not worked enough to resort to the national employment services, the National Agency for Employment (ANPE), they are orientated towards another organisation, the missions locales- their local dimension being reflected in their very name. They focus on the social inclusion of young people and not merely on employment- they have a global approach to social inclusion and also deal with health and accommodation issues. Missions locales have branches in the most disadvantaged areas.

*Illustration of the local implementation in the Nice region- about 70 square km.*



Mission Locale, Sophia Antipolis, Annual Report 2005

The local dimension of the missions is reflected by the map, this is clearly in contrast with British agencies whose numbers have shrunk since the creation of jobcentre plus and the impetus given to the notion of cost efficiency:

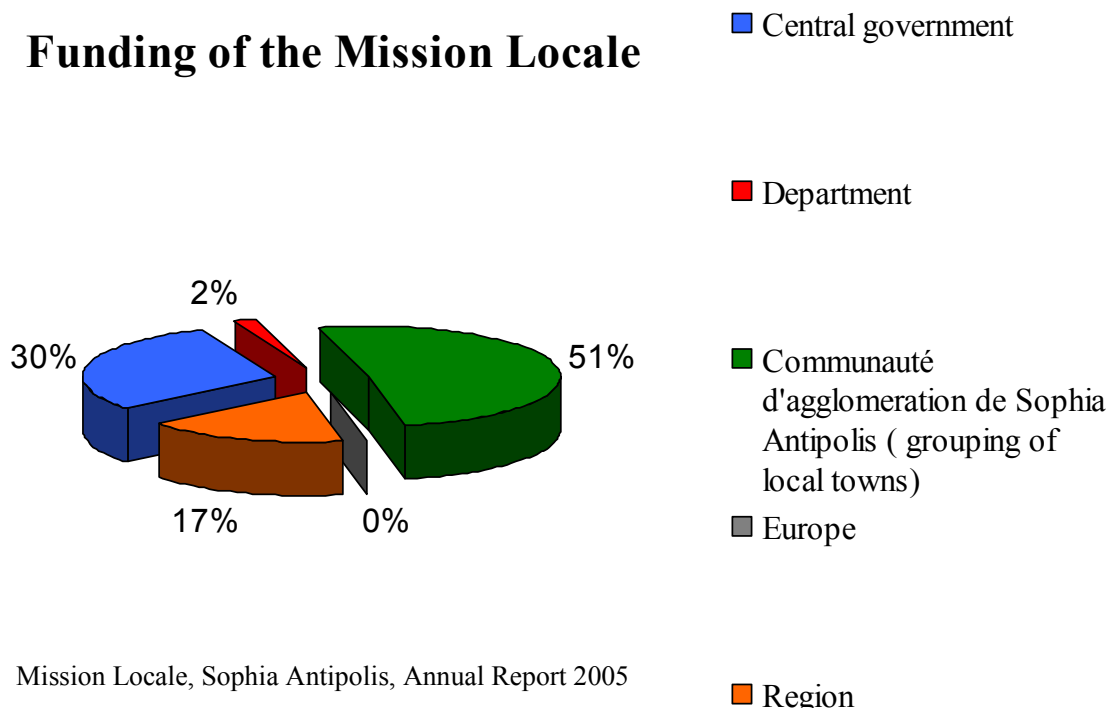
We continuously evaluate our services and the network from which they are delivered. If it becomes clear that some of our offices are less cost efficient and that services can be more effectively delivered from an alternative location we will reconfigure our network. Reducing expenditure on our office network is part of our wider strategy for focusing resources more effectively on frontline advisory services to help our customers move into work<sup>5</sup>

As the missions locales are implanted locally, they tend to develop close links with the local community. For instance in the area of Nice, in one relatively isolated area, the mission locale

<sup>5</sup> Lesley Strathie, Chief Executive of Jobcentre Plus, House of Commons (2005), Hansard, questions to the government.

developed links with other associations in order that young people might be lent motor scooters to go to work. The origin of mission locales' subsidies also reflects the local dimension of the network:

## Funding of the Mission Locale



Mission Locale, Sophia Antipolis, Annual Report 2005

The majority of the funding coming from the Communauté d'Agglomération de Sophia Antipolis, that is to say the local urban community – towns and villages grouping. So that we here find the term we avoided when dealing with France, here the term has still a purely administrative dimension- when looking at the occurrences of the term *communauté* in the French reference dictionary, it often appears in law, in the civil code mostly - So that when not used in a negative way, it remains a dry, administrative term.

### 2) Employing young jobseekers

If one way of helping young people to become fully active in the social process is to help them find a job, another option is to employ them directly. As we have already seen, most programmes have been designed at least partly to give something back to the community, but are the programmes also presented as an opportunity for the community to help young people become full members of the community? Young people have often been chosen as the target of pilot welfare to work programmes, because they are the less controversial group, generally seen them as a group prone to idleness, but are there been allusions to the possibility of helping young people in the campaigns for these programmes? In France, the mission locales, advertise the process called "*parrainage*" (the employer acts as a godfather); So that the local employer does not simply employ because he needs an employee but also to facilitate the inclusion process. In its annual report, the mission locale of Sophia Antipolis, really put forward the close relation between the employer and the employee where the employer clearly acts as a guide and protector of the young jobseekers.

In the United Kingdom, some local employers have shown their will to help the unemployed beyond the government schemes objectives: For instance the Bristol City Council aimed at employing New Deal participants in the long term to make the social inclusion process complete.

## CONCLUSION

Defining the role of the community in helping young people in the social inclusion process and in finding a job is not that obvious. When comparing countries we are faced with the issue of the transferability of terms; Even if words seem familiar they will rarely cover the same meanings, and might even have contradictory connotations;

This analysis nevertheless allowed us to put forward a certain number of similarities and differences between the three countries. There clearly is a close link between the issue of social cohesion and welfare to work programmes for young people. Welfare to work programmes are mostly designed to make sure young people, seen as a population “at risk”, won’t remain idle and outside mainstream values. The programmes are often linked to needs not answered by the private sector and increasing the general well-being, activities undertaken by young people should be useful to the community. In the three countries the local level seems to be the most valued as local actors are presented as the most knowledgeable about the reality of the situation.

There are nevertheless a range of differences between the three countries. The punitive dimension of the work for the dole programme is less significant in the United Kingdom or in France. This dimension was even absent from the French NS EJ programme as the contracts were signed on a voluntary basis. Skills are another point of divergence, with the Australian programme, work for the dole, clearly not being focused on the topic. Lastly the role of the different actors varies in the three countries, France differentiating itself with the major role of the family until late in the twenties. This is one of the consequences of having an insurance based system, contrary to the United Kingdom and Australia, young French people have no direct access to unemployment benefits; in France, the easiest way to claim money from the government is to stay in education, which might explain another difference between France and the two Anglo-Saxon countries: the number of post-compulsory education students.