
Case Study on the Prevention of Racial Discrimination and Xenophobia and the Promotion of Equal Treatment in the Workplace

France

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**EUROPEAN FOUNDATION
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**CASE STUDY ON THE PREVENTION OF RACIAL
DISCRIMINATION AND XENOPHOBIA AND THE PROMOTION
OF EQUAL TREATMENT IN THE WORKPLACE**

FRANCE

by

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FOREWORD

This study has been conducted by researchers from the Unité de Recherche “Migrations et Société” [Migrations and Society Research Unit] of the CNRS and the Universities of Paris 7 and Paris 8.

The fact that it is impossible to find a French equivalent of a “guide to good practices” governing labour relations, including multi-ethnic relations within foreign enterprises, or of the application of the principle of “positive discrimination” in favour of ethnic minorities, led us to select a specific case of an equal opportunities policy based on the application of a “local preference”, within the more general framework of a policy to “combat social exclusion”. On the employer’s side, the programme in question is part of a policy of “enterprise citizenship”.

Such measures and practices are generally aimed at disadvantaged population groups and are often implemented in inner city districts or suburbs. These are usually the districts in which “immigrants” or, as they sometimes call themselves, people of foreign origin, tend to be concentrated. As a result of a deliberate municipal social policy, these measures and practices have the *indirect* purpose of promoting equal opportunities and preventing racism, xenophobia and discrimination.

It is, however, difficult to assess results because of the lack of appropriate evaluation methods and, most particularly, because of the lack of statistical data, which are extremely limited and, in some cases, more or less prohibited in France.

We conducted our case study in the specific context of a major urban restructuring project, involving the provision of significant regional commercial facilities. This explains the relatively extensive staff recruitment operation - a very rare event during the current employment crisis.

We should like to thank everyone who gave us their time, answered our questions and provided us with so much invaluable information. We would not have been able to conduct our study without their help and support.

We are aware that we have not been able to describe the context and conditions of the project in as much detail as we would have liked. We lacked sufficient time to look in depth at the hopes and aims of the various actors and partners concerned or to examine in detail the full complexity of the events and interactions involved.

We hope we shall be able to expand upon this initial analysis and would, therefore, be grateful for any comments or corrections that might help us to conduct subsequent more detailed research.

For now, we hope we have contributed towards meeting one of the objectives of our contract with the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions: identifying the French version of “positive discrimination”.

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Editorial Note

This report was written in French and translated into English for publication by the European Foundation. It is the intention of the authors to seek publication of the report in its original language.

In the French language of today there are many terms with racial connotations - obviously mostly slang - and it was impossible to find English equivalents for all of the terms currently used in France.

The authors have asked that the French terms used in the original report be given in this translation. Where this is the case, the French term is shown in *italicised brackets* after the word.

CHAPTER 1

NATIONAL CONTEXT

1.1 Immigrant populations in France

- **Foreign and immigrant populations in France: the lack of statistical data**

Official French statistics have traditionally recorded only a person's legal nationality. This means that they distinguish between French nationals and foreigners, who are then further classified by nationality or grouped by geographical (or administrative) area; it is also becoming increasingly common for a distinction to be drawn with regard to EU nationals. Some sources have long recorded the original nationality of "naturalised French citizens", but not of others.

In a political and social context in which there is much debate on the extent of immigration, both in terms of migration flows and in terms of the number of established immigrants, the whole notion of "immigrant" - which is the term the man in the street might use for all the "outsiders" so often used as scapegoats - has finally been "officially" defined. This population category first appeared in 1990, virtually simultaneously, in a survey conducted by the Institut National d'Études Démographiques [National Institute of Population Studies], in a report produced by the Haut Conseil à l'Intégration [Higher Integration Council] and in the 1990 population survey. The official definition is very different from the popular one, in that it classes as "immigrants" only those people who, although they are resident in France, were born outside French territory, irrespective of whether they are foreign or have acquired French nationality. This definition of immigrant is not entirely consistent. In particular, although they are neither naturalised French nor foreign, it embraces people who are French by birth and were born in the overseas departments and territories (who are often "coloured"), and yet it excludes people who are French by birth and were born abroad, who are assimilated with those born in France. It does, nonetheless, as was its objective, record basic information on (so-called "direct") population growth as a result of immigration.

As matters stand at present, the children of immigrants who have had French nationality from birth¹ are absolutely "statistically invisible", with the result that it is impossible to gain a retrospective picture, even over just two generations, of trends concerning children whose parents - or even grandparents - were of foreign nationality. According to generally accepted

¹ To be French by birth, a person must have at least one French parent or a foreign parent who was born on French territory (provided, in the case of people whose parents are of Algerian nationality, that he or she has been a regular resident for at least five years). Until December 1993, children born in France of foreign parents automatically became "French by birth", unless they chose to give up their French nationality between the ages of 16 and 21. Under the Méhaignerie Law these people are still entitled to become French, but not automatically, which means they are no longer recorded as "French by birth" but are instead initially recorded as foreigners and then as "French by declaration". The people concerned are now required to submit a "statement of intent" between the ages of 16 and 25. The authorities have the power to reject their application, particularly on criminal or "public order" grounds.

estimates, this concerns about a quarter of all French nationals². It may be that the introduction of the category of “immigrant” will, in the long term, make it possible to rectify to some extent the current impossibility of tracking trends through the generations, provided future official surveys include a question on the place of birth or original nationality of parents, and possibly grandparents. It would, however, be unreasonable to hope that this would make it possible to look further back through the generations and, in any case, responses would become increasingly unreliable the further back one tried to go (Simon, 1996³).

Since, in France, no data are held on membership of ethnic, religious, linguistic and, therefore, “racial” groups, “representative” data on “immigrants” are sociologically better than data that cover foreigners only. They do not, however, correspond to what would, in other European countries and elsewhere, be termed “ethnic groups”, “ethnic communities” or “minorities”. Such groups are still being deliberately “left out” of official figures. There are, however, some estimates that, as they are based on indirect and qualitative methods (surname, self-declaration, place of birth, language used in the home, etc.), need to be treated with some caution in terms of their sociological reliability and whose representativeness is always questionable (hence the frequent use of “bracketing”). The 1985 law on databases, computer files and civil liberties bans virtually any recording of data of this kind, which are deemed to be “sensitive”, in the same way as are data on political beliefs or trade union membership. We shall return later to the legal, political and social implications and consequences of this.

- **Immigrants, their nationalities and countries of origin**

Of France’s total population (56.6 million according to the most recent census), 4.2 million (or 7.4%) are, according to the definition given above, classed as “immigrants” (Tribalat, 1995). As we have already said, these are people born outside France who are either of foreign nationality (2.9 million, or two thirds of the total) or have “acquired” French nationality (1.3 million). A large proportion of those who immigrated to France from other European countries (Poland, Italy, Spain) many years ago, as well as a considerable number of refugees from South-East Asia, now have French nationality. Finally, of all foreigners (3.6 million), one in five (0.7 million) were born in France and are therefore not classed as “immigrants”.

Some 42.2% of immigrants in France come from other EU Member States; and 53% of Spanish immigrants and 56% of Italian immigrants have acquired French nationality. Immigrants from Portugal, who form the largest group, have tended to keep their original nationality (only 16.5% are naturalised French). People from North Africa account for 38.7% of all immigrants in France; they come mainly from Algeria and Morocco and, again, have tended to keep their original nationality (with only 16% being naturalised). Asians account for 11.4% of all France’s immigrants, while people from sub-Saharan Africa account for 6.6%.

The number of people who have taken French nationality has risen considerably over the past few years (from 65 000 in 1990 to 93 000 in 1994), whereas the number of foreigners fell

² Estimate by the Institut National d’Études Démographiques included in the 1990 report of the Haut Conseil à l’Intégration.

³ It should be noted that the category of “immigrant” has been introduced at a time of very little migratory movement.

slightly over the same period, for the first time since 1946. This is explained by the fact that the waves of migration that took place in the 1960s are now well in the past and have stabilised and by the small number of new arrivals (with the migration balance falling regularly since 1992, from 90 000 that year to 40 000 in 1995; see Lévy, 1997), but it can also be attributed to the tightening-up of the regulations governing foreigners' rights of entry and residence in France since the mid-1970s, which has had a particular impact on people from non-EU countries⁴.

- **Employment, skills and sectors of activity**

In 1995, the 1 970 000 immigrant workers in France represented 7.8% of the total working population. The participation rate among male immigrants is slightly higher than the national average, particularly in the case of the younger and older age brackets. By contrast, the participation rate among female immigrants is slightly lower than the national average, except in the case of young women.

The great majority of immigrants work in the private sector (71%, not including temporary jobs). This is due mainly to the fact that immigrants who have retained their original nationality do not really have access to jobs in the public sector (at either national or regional level), which account for 23.1% of all employees in France (but only 9% of immigrant employees).

Despite the general trend whereby employment is shifting from the secondary to the tertiary sector, immigrants are still clearly over-represented among blue-collar workers. Thus, they account for 12.5% of this occupational group, which now comprises only 7.1% of all workers at national level. Some 46.3% of immigrants (and 58.7% of male immigrants) are blue-collar workers, as against a national average of 26.4%. More than half of Moroccan, Algerian and Portuguese immigrants are in this occupational category.

A quarter (24.2%) of immigrants are white-collar workers, as against a national average of 28.4%. The majority (50.8%) of women immigrant workers are in white-collar jobs, particularly in the personal-services sector.

Whatever their job, women immigrants tend to be less skilled than their male counterparts.

Irrespective of their occupational category, immigrants are in an especially vulnerable position on the labour market. They are over-represented in temporary or fixed-term jobs. But, above all, they are much more likely than a French national to be out of work. The overall unemployment rate among immigrants is 20%, compared with a national average of 12%. There are, in particular, twice as many male immigrants seeking work as there are in work. Blue-collar jobs, which have been particularly badly hit by restructuring, but also white-collar jobs are really suffering the effects of unemployment, but it is in the intermediate occupational categories and among professional and managerial staff that the gap between national averages and the averages for immigrants is widest (with the unemployment rate among immigrants being double the national average).

⁴ The freedom of movement of EU nationals is accompanied by agreements concerning the monitoring and restriction of entries by nationals of other countries (see, in particular, the Schengen agreements of 1985, which have been in force since 1995).

Finally, given the structure of their skills and qualifications, immigrants have limited access to continuing training. Just 22% of them (and only 17% of immigrants from the Maghreb) have had this type of vocational training, as against a national average of 44%.

Immigrants are over-represented in sectors with the hardest working conditions (construction, building and public works), where the imperatives of short-term profitability are strong and where staff are particularly affected by economic events (intermediate goods, services). These are the sectors where unemployment is at its highest, changes of enterprises are most common and length of service tends to be shortest. As for the shift towards the tertiary sector, this implies less a concomitant improvement in skills than a shift away from recruitment by major industrial undertakings towards employment in small enterprises in the craft, commercial and services sectors, which are often sub-contractors (Échardour and Maurin, 1993).

1.2 Social, political and legal context

- **The Republican model and ethnic or racial discrimination**

French institutions - both the body of laws and regulations and the public authorities and State administrations - refer to France's republican tradition in promoting, and even celebrating, a model of integration that is based on the direct relationship between the universal citizen/individual, free from all oppressive servitude and any collective grouping, and the Nation State⁵. This means that intermediaries who might use ethnic background, "race" or religion to secure special collective rights are deprived of any representative legitimacy⁶. The very notion of "minority" (be it national, ethnic, religious or linguistic) is rejected by the French State, which refuses to sign international treaties and conventions that mention it or ratifies them only subject to a declaration whereby the articles that refer to the notion "*do not apply to the Republic*" (Conseil d'État [Supreme Administrative Court], 1996). This position, which therefore applies to every French citizen, also applies to any foreigner who is not a French citizen, who is subject to the same principles of individual equality both before and under the law.

The French response to cultural and ethnic diversity is, then, clearly one of assimilation. This is true on the legal level and, as S. Castles comments (1995), also applies on the social and cultural level. The expression of any sense of belonging to a particular group or minority culture is governed by the law, which grants individuals the right to such expression, within certain limits, but denies it to the corresponding communities, which it does not recognise.

⁵ According to the Supreme Administrative Court's public report on the principle of equality (1996), the fact that the notion of equality derives from the time of the Revolution and the founding of the Republic has led French law to promote the protection of individuals against the arbitrariness of political authority and the social oppression of orders and corporations, rather than preserving the collective rights that might have emerged instead with the proclamation of popular unity.

⁶ Religions in practice have institutions that have to some extent been recognized as partners of the State since the 1905 laws on secularity, freedom of belief and freedom of worship.

The prevention of discrimination is governed by this same individualistic conception, though anti-racist organisations are entitled to act as plaintiff in cases brought before the courts on the ground of racism. Legislative instruments to punish attacks on human rights, incitement to racial hatred and discrimination have gradually been introduced since the 1970s. Although these instruments are now relatively plentiful, they are nonetheless essentially “defensive”, with very little provision being made for prevention. The instruments available are also of varying effectiveness. Protection against discrimination on ethnic, racial or religious grounds is proving particularly ineffectual, since it is virtually impossible for a plaintiff to prove not only that discrimination has taken place but that it was intentional discrimination on the part of the defendant (De Rudder, Tripier and Vourc’h, 1995).

French law has no “positive” legal instrument to halt or prevent either indirect discrimination or, more particularly, institutional or systematic discrimination, since it has no means of taking account of groups that are in a minority situation. Nor can it promote positive discrimination measures to offset the collective inequalities that have been inherited from the past.

In our research, we find ourselves up against this paradoxical situation of compulsory “blindness” to the facts associated with any sense of collective belonging, whose legal recognition, or even acknowledgement, remain illicit. As we said earlier, the categories used by public institutions and legislation concerning the collection of “descriptive” information in surveys, databases, etc., prevents us from identifying what happens, in the medium and long term, to groups that have fallen into a minority during the history of the development of the national population.

The “French model”, therefore, now faces various difficulties. The formal nature of equality under the law is increasingly proving to provide inadequate protection at a time of economic recession and job shortages, in which we are seeing an increase in, or polarisation of, social and economic inequalities, some of which derive from ethnic or racial discrimination and segregation. The proponents of “anti-immigrant” racism, which is being openly expressed and has its political representatives, are beginning to exercise a form of real collective intimidation. The failure to take account of membership and the expression of a specific community is sometimes experienced as an oppression that deprives minority groups of the resources that might be available to them.

But, more to the point, what we are seeing is a widening gap between the word of the law and the actions of the institutions who are supposed to respect the law and ensure that others comply with it, too. The police have always used racial labels, “internally”, and regularly carry out spot checks based on “appearance/features”, whose underlying suspicion is being reinforced by current “Islamic” attacks. The bodies responsible for managing public housing use their concern to prevent the formation of ghettos to justify the imposition of illegal quotas, which are fully accepted and subject to no monitoring of any kind. Even the public education system, seen as the absolute foundation of the “Republican melting-pot”, is subject to processes of ethnic labelling that entail a segregation of users, and is surrendering almost invisibly to a subtle “dosing” system.

Certainly, the aim of some of these actions is to prevent the sharpening of ethnic divides, to protect individuals against discriminatory abuse and, sometimes, even to give them the edge in an uneven competition by taking a kind of unofficial “positive action”.

But, whatever the case, such unframed, unsanctioned manipulation of ethnic, or racial, categories by authorities and institutions that are not supposed to recognise their existence, a manipulation that is not countered by sufficiently effective laws to provide protection against the disadvantages and prejudices that might emerge because of it, is a source of tension and heavy with potential for causing harm. This manipulation is, however, a manifestation of an awareness that is being more and more clearly expressed and leading to a more or less explicit quest to “adapt the model”.

- **Current trends: raising of awareness and adaptation of the model**

The defence or questioning of the “Republican model” has become a daily subject of public debate, particularly in the media. The virtues of the so-called “French” model are being compared with the advantages and, more often, the disadvantages of the “community-based” (i.e. Anglo-Saxon) or “ethnic” (i.e. German) model. But the limitations of the rigid application of principles are also subject to criticism. The research world is participating in these discussions and often takes sides. Some researchers point to “the crisis” affecting the model because major national institutions such as the education system, the army and major intermediaries such as the Church and the trade unions have lost their capacity for integration; and these same researchers will make an even broader generalisation in pointing to the “weakening of the social fabric”. Others are looking at the possibility of devising a multi-cultural approach “à la française”, which still others dismiss.

The deepening of inequalities and the geographical “pinning”, in deprived urban or semi-urban areas, of population groups who are suffering from all sorts of deficits (employment, resources, training, citizenship, etc.) and have become the new “under-class”, is worrying on various counts. They encourage residential corporatism and the expression of a “petit-blanc” racism that calls for “national preference”, which are clearly expressed in votes for the Front National but extend well beyond this group of voters. They reveal not only the formal nature but also the very fragility of the principle of equal rights, as it is set out in the constitution and as it has always been interpreted.

This is the context in which people are seeking, by different and sometimes divergent means, the most effective ways of protecting minorities without completely overturning a “model” that, because it is less real and rigid than we are sometimes led to believe, is still a vital point of reference. There is, indeed, a considerable attachment to the values incorporated in the model. That it should be abandoned is hardly desirable and is perceived as politically and legally unimaginable. There is also very strong opposition to the idea of producing quantitative data on “race” or “ethnic” origin, which is, in the French political imagination, associated with the practices of the Fascist and collaborationist Vichy government. Corrective “positive discrimination” policies, such as those pursued in the USA in the 1960s and 1970s, arouse considerable discomfort and are rarely demanded, since they, too, to be introduced and enforced, would require the compilation of data.

These debates and discussions led the highest administrative body in France, the Conseil d'État [Supreme Administrative Court], to dedicate most of its annual report for 1996 to a study of the principle of equality and its applications. Confirmation of the principle of equality of individual rights is accompanied by a call for more vigorous promotion of equal opportunities, *“to reduce the excessive inequalities that are, especially in the economic and social sphere, threatening the very equilibrium of French society”*. Although the individualistic basis of French legislation is reaffirmed, the idea is also put forward that *“justified discrimination”* has actually been included in French law ever since the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, provided it is based on a difference in situation and/or is motivated by general interest. Positive discrimination is seen as *“a particular category of justified discrimination, implemented by a deliberate policy and with the objective of reducing inequality”*. The author cites numerous cases of the application of *“justified discrimination”*, especially as regards regional issues and particularly over the past fifteen years, with a view to *“compensating for regional handicaps”* and *“correcting inequalities”*.

These notions of “compensation” and “correction”, which are at the very heart of *affirmative action* policies, are not, in this case, applied to population groups defined collectively by features that remain beyond the law. Rather, they are applied to these groups indirectly, because of their sometimes massive presence in regional areas that are subject to measures of “justified discrimination”. This is true of the “Zones d'Éducation Prioritaires” [Priority Education Zones] that were introduced in 1981, whereby disadvantaged districts were provided with special resources, in derogation from the principle of the equal distribution of resources on the basis of school attendance figures, and of the “Zones Urbaines Sensibles” [Sensitive Urban Zones] that were defined in 1995 and the “Zones Franches” [Free Zones] that were set up in 1996.

1.3 Enterprises and discrimination in the workplace

The concealment of racism and the use of euphemisms for discrimination in the world of work that we discovered during our 1995 study (De Rudder, Tripier and Vourc'h, 1995) have certainly not disappeared. Awareness of these issues, which are now a regular subject of articles in the press, has nevertheless increased and is evident among public bodies responsible for helping people to find jobs, educational establishments (particularly in the area of technical and vocational training), enterprises, trade-union organisations and, of course, anti-racism organisations.

Having for a long time been “protected” (or so they believed) by the principles and codes governing employment relationships, enterprises have recently become a battle field for the Far Right, which is gaining increasing ground. For example, new organisations that describe themselves as “trade unions” but make no secret of their links with the Front National [National Front] are trying to get their foot in the door, particularly in the public sector and within the Tribunaux de Prud'hommes [conciliation boards responsible for settling labour disputes], and the Front National is also trying to “infiltrate” existing trade union bodies (Libération, 19 February 1997).

Despite this, it would be impossible to find a public organisation or enterprise in France that has an explicit policy to prevent racism and xenophobia in the workplace. This means that it would undoubtedly be impossible to find a single organisation or enterprise with a “code of good practice” in this field⁷.

It is via another route, that of the inequalities and specific difficulties concerning job access for people who have no training and/or are ghettoized in “problem” districts, that enterprises approach these issues. For example, the Conseil National du Patronat Français [CNPF - National Council of French Employers] has set up a campaign and discussion committee, “Citoyenneté de l’entreprise” [Enterprise citizenship], whose purpose is to contribute to the “*fight against exclusion*” and “*to make an active contribution to the development of the enterprise environment*” (CNPF, 1996). The objective of most of the programmes contained within this framework is to establish links between enterprises and their local environment (catchment area, regional groups, local district), by marrying “*solidarity and the competitive spirit*”.

This means that it is in policies and practices that are being implemented under titles such as “the fight against social exclusion” or “job solidarity” that we find measures or practices that are tending, albeit indirectly, to promote equal opportunities and, even more indirectly, to put an end to discriminatory processes. Such initiatives are very few and far between and have a variety of focuses in terms of their objectives and target audiences (training for young people who have no skills, placements for trainees, hiring people who are long-term unemployed, paying people’s travelling expenses to attend job interviews, modifying hiring and recruitment procedures, developing sports activities, etc.).

Some of these actions can be interpreted as de facto attempts to “adapt” or “selectively apply” the principle of common law. Although we do not know of a single document or project that explicitly mentions members of minority groups as the “target audience” of a programme, everyone knows - even if they refuse to say it or even admit it to themselves - that this target audience is of prime importance. By way of example, some bodies responsible for the occupational integration of young people with difficulties are setting up “guardianship” systems, whereby some young people receive individual and highly personalised help while they are looking for a job and for the first few months that they are in work. This may not apply specifically to young people who might be the object of ethnic or racial discrimination, but they are often the ones who are top of the list.

⁷ It is not impossible that, faced with the tension being caused by far-right “union” agitation, some enterprises will soon be forced to consider these issues in more specific terms, or even, if pressure from traditional trade union organisations were to be stronger, to adopt “codes of good practice”.

THE CASE STUDY IN ITS LOCAL CONTEXT

The case study here illustrates these attempts to adapt the “Republican model” by applying measures based on a territorial definition of social problems. Some caution is exercised in making concrete references to target groups, although the beneficiaries are largely immigrant populations.

2.1 Choice of site and survey methods

- **Local preference as a way of adapting the model**

We analysed the staff recruitment and training procedures of a hypermarket (Continent) in a large shopping complex (Grand Littoral) recently opened in an urban area suffering from many social problems: unemployment and insecure employment, low incomes, high proportion of people on benefit, high percentage of young people without any qualifications or training, etc. (Quartiers-Nord, Marseilles). Staff are recruited on the basis of a “local preference” policy, which has been publicly announced and which is applied not merely at municipal level but actually targets people living in the Quartiers-Nord. There is a high percentage of foreigners and French citizens of foreign origin in this area, a situation of which, as we shall see, everyone is aware, without necessarily openly acknowledging it.

After lengthy discussions with various enterprises that have adopted training or occupational integration policies based on regional preference and thus covering a range of minority populations, we eventually selected Continent for our case study for several reasons:

- it is an unusually large undertaking; the opening of the hypermarket has created a relatively large number of jobs (450), despite the current local employment crisis, in a relatively short time (six months to a year);
- the method of recruitment used, accompanied by basic vocational training, was designed specifically with regard to the local catchment area;
- most of the people who have been hired are members of minority ethnic groups, who are part of an overall population that is generally defined as marginalised and disadvantaged;
- the recruitment procedure gave rise to close cooperation between the public services, an association whose work focuses on combating exclusion, and the enterprise;
- the process for selecting candidates was very clear and transparent.

- **The involvement of many actors**

One of the unique features here is that the policy that was eventually followed had not been defined in advance but gradually developed as various challenges and difficulties emerged, requiring negotiations among various public and private agents, as well as with local people. Although the policy of “local positive discrimination” that was eventually adopted for recruitment purposes is now hailed as a success by everyone, its application entailed sacrifices

for all those concerned, with everyone involved having to modify their original demands, habitual approaches or traditional methods of working.

The recruitment policy lies at the very heart of a vast urban restructuring operation and is part of a complicated local situation, which is why we decided to expand our study to cover the context in which the policy was set up and implemented. It would have been absurd to limit ourselves to interviewing only people within the enterprise, since the original notion and actual implementation of the “local preference” policy were, in this case, the product of interactions between various agents. The recruitment procedure involved not only the hypermarket’s management but also various national and local bodies responsible for employment (Agence Locale pour l’Emploi [Local Employment Agency], Direction Départementale de l’Emploi [Departmental Employment Office], etc.) and a private foundation. And, on an even broader scale, these institutional actors were themselves obliged to act in accordance with circumstances marked by the social and political mobilisation of local agents, whether representative (elected representatives, trade unions), organised (committees of unemployed or young people) or unorganised (“spontaneous” lobbying, etc.). Usually left out of the picture, local people played a vital role in this case and were involved in negotiations.

Essentially, our survey took the form of carefully targeted interviews with the various actors involved. The questions we asked concerned the background of the policy, the role that each actor had played, opinions of the actual procedure and, of course, assessment of the results achieved.

We did not have enough time to conduct an exhaustive survey, but our selection of interviewees is highly representative of the various positions of the actors involved. Outside the enterprise, we held interviews with representatives of the Tréma Group, the promoter of the Grand Littoral shopping centre. At local level, we met representatives of the local authorities and of various public employment programmes, the foundation “Agir contre l’Exclusion” [Combating Exclusion], the trade unions, committees of unemployed union members, committees of local young people, the deputy-mayor for the district⁸, social mediators, etc.

Within Continent itself, we interviewed the manager, the human resources manager, heads of departments, employees and trade unionists.

- **Positive discrimination and voluntary Daltonism**

Here, we need to emphasise an essential aspect of the policy applied - an aspect that heavily influences comprehension and interpretation of our research findings.

The adoption of a positive discrimination policy focusing on the local area - Quartiers-Nord - obliged all the actors involved officially and deliberately to do away with the stigmatising classifications that are commonly used to “define” the people living in these areas. Ethnic or “racial” labels, in particular, which are used for political purposes and have a highly xenophobic

⁸ Like Lyons and Paris, Marseilles has a special “two-tier” municipal structure. Mayors of the various districts, whose powers are limited, are elected by popular vote and represent their districts on the municipal council, which then elects the town mayor.

or racist slant⁹, were, therefore, deliberately “forgotten”. This process involved local people, the public authorities and public services and, perhaps above all, Continent’s managerial staff.

As a general rule, relations between the staff of major retail enterprises and the residents of the public housing estates nearby are limited and often tense. Local people are either totally absent or badly under-represented among the staff of shopping centres, where they are perceived and treated as “high-risk customers” - the economic risks associated with their actual or presumed poverty, but also the potential risks of criminal acts, which may range from simple shoplifting to violent attacks. There have been cases of looting, fights with security officers and confrontations with police officers, some of which have resulted in deaths. In Marseilles itself, two supermarkets had security problems a few years ago, and one of them was looted soon after it opened.

The managers of Continent-Grand Littoral in Marseilles all come from other shops, largely in the south of France, and are aware of these problems and of the way in which they are usually described. They have been required to look at their stereotypes, the language they use and their very beliefs, in what could be compared to a bereavement process, with the loss of commonly shared racial stereotypes and language (“Maghrebis”, “North Africans” (“*beurs/beurettes*”*), “blacks”, etc.) and of other, also very stigmatising perceptions (delinquents, tramps, layabouts, etc.) that are often associated. They also had to accept in advance that they would be working with these “types” of people, whom they had more or less become accustomed to dismissing. In order to do this, they have had to develop “colour blindness” in a way that could almost be termed “voluntary Daltonism” (Neveu, 1996).

Members of committees of unemployed people or district committees have had to work on their prejudices in a similar way and accept as their unifying point of reference a degree of “*respect for the communities*”, for each and every individual living in the area, without discrimination.

This means that, in contrast with the British practice, whereby a virtually exhaustive survey of “minority ethnic groups” in an area is used as a basis for positive discrimination in their favour, the process undertaken in Quartiers-Nord has been a “wager” of almost Pascalian dimension, based on the belief that, if all references to people’s ethnic or racial origin are removed and people are simply treated as equals, it will be possible to ensure that members of stigmatised groups have access to jobs.

It is, then, hardly surprising that our questions on “ethnic background”, origin, cultural and religious practices, etc., might well have given the impression of a sort of inadmissible and retrograde movement or “return of the tide” and might even have been perceived as an actual denial of the exemplary nature of the process and of what has been accomplished (see Section 4.4 below).

* Nickname for young Maghrebis mainly born in France and of French nationality. Although the word was originally created by themselves during the 1980’s by inverting and adapting the syllables of the word “Arabe”, it is now widely used in a derogatory sense. *Beurettes* is the feminine of *beurs*.

⁹ This is true throughout France, but is particularly acute in the region of Provence-Côte d’Azur, where the dislike of “immigrant” populations is often openly expressed, including by strong support for the Extreme Right.

2.2 Urban and social context

Marseilles' Quartiers-Nord are classed as "sensitive" urban areas because of a whole range of economic and social difficulties and insecurities that are affecting the people who live there and because of certain features - particularly of a demographic nature - that distinguish them from other nearby districts. The Quartiers-Nord are also multi-ethnic¹⁰.

Marseilles, which is the third largest city in France (with a population of more than 800 000), has traditionally been a cosmopolitan city and the port of arrival of many waves of immigrants, some of whom have settled there. Since at least the nineteenth century, Marseilles has been marked by a powerful social division of space, with a central, working class port area, where the resident population is constantly changing; a residential area in the south, which is favoured by higher middle class business people; and an industrial, working class area in the north. This segregation has become more marked since the 1960s, with an even clearer divide emerging between the working class northern/central area, which is suffering from very serious unemployment, and the southern/central area, where professional and managerial staff are in the majority (Mazzella, 1996). The distribution of foreigners in the city confirms and emphasises this process of segregation. Since the 1975 census, A Chenu (1981) notes that "*Algerian immigrants (...) have been becoming increasingly ghettoized in the central districts of Port d'Aix, in the case of single workers, and in the Quartiers-Nord, in the case of families. (...) This population group is becoming an underclass in an unprecedented way*".

The 1980s were crisis time for Marseilles: its population fell, with a particularly marked drop in the number of well-off residents; jobs became scarce and unemployment grew at a rate well above the national average, particularly in the Quartiers-Nord, which became increasingly ghettoized from the rest of the city.

The Quartiers-Nord, with a population of some 68 000, comprise large housing estates, most of them HLMs [habitation à loyer modéré - public low-cost housing], that have been built around old village centres and lie amidst numerous patches of industrial wasteland. About half of all Quartiers-Nord residents live in public housing and there is a high proportion of large families, which in turn implies a high proportion of young people (22% of people living on the estates are under the age of 15)¹¹.

Insecure employment, part-time jobs and unemployment, none of them by choice, are especially widespread. Overall, a third of all residents of working age are without employment, with the percentage rising above 40% in some areas¹². Half of those who are working have experienced one or several interruptions in employment for periods of eight month or more.

¹⁰ The relative weight of the so-called "immigrant" population functions as a "symptom" of social difficulties, and even urban degradation, and can even be used as an eligibility criterion for applying for special funding, even when the issue is veiled in euphemisms such as "ethnically neutral".

¹¹ The figures given here do not correspond precisely to the area known as "the Quartiers-Nord", but rather to the area covered by Marseilles' "Grand Projet Urbain" [Major Urban Project], which was formulated in 1994. This area is one of a dozen special urban development areas in France. However, the fact that the Quartiers-Nord largely corresponds to the areas covered by various urban-renewal and social-revitalization projects means that these figures, though not exact, provide a good idea of the current situation. See *Le grand projet urbain de Marseille: état des lieux* [Marseilles' major urban project: progress report], 1996.

¹² The official unemployment figure of 13 200 is considered, even by officials, to be below the real figure.

Two thirds of those who are without work have been unemployed for more than a year, and six out of ten do not receive benefit. Young people (aged 15-24) are being particularly badly affected, with an unemployment rate of more than 40%, rising to more than 50% in some areas. These young people have often left school early and have neither qualifications nor any vocational training. But then, skilled, qualified people tend to be few and far between in this population.

Household incomes are low and often irregular and many households are dependent on various benefits.

Some of the features we have described here are among those that to some extent characterise all the districts in France that were defined as “priority areas” under municipal policies within the framework of the Eleventh National Plan¹³. Compared with the averages for these areas, however, Marseilles’ Quartiers-Nord suffer even more serious disadvantages in terms of unemployment, income levels and occupational skill levels.

- **Are there “ethnic minorities” in the Quartiers-Nord ?**

It is impossible, by definition, to know, even roughly, for what proportion of the population of these areas people of foreign origin account. The proportion of foreigners, which averages 12% (but may be more than 20% in some areas, and possibly even more on some estates), is lower than in many other districts that have been pinpointed as current or potential targets for urban social development plans, or have been classified as “priority areas”.

Everyone knows, however, that, in Marseilles and even in France as a whole, the populations of these areas comprise very large numbers of first- or second-generation residents of foreign origin, “minority groups”, people of a “different” culture - that is, population groups that are socially defined by a “negative difference” of whatever kind. The numbers of “Maghrebis”, in particular, are very high (sometimes accounting for as much as three quarters of the resident population). Since there is no official or consensual definition of the term “ethnic group”, it is, for example, possible to claim, without any fear of contradiction or hope of confirmation, both that “*there are 33 different ethnic groups*” in these districts, that everyone, or nearly everyone, is an “immigrant”, a member of a “minority group” or in some way “different” and, at the same time, that foreigners, strictly speaking, are few in number.

It is usually in social terms (their many difficulties, their problems concerning employment and resources - in short, their “social handicaps”), however, that these resident populations are described, including by themselves. Although Marseilles is known and perceived as a “cosmopolitan city”, it would seem that everyone avoids mentioning the concentration of minority groups in its northern districts or calling too much attention to the fact. One of the reasons for this is undoubtedly the fact that it is something that everyone is aware of and that, therefore, “goes without saying”. Another reason is the wish not to encourage the inter-ethnic

¹³ Marseilles’ Quartiers-Nord are among the urban or semi-urban areas considered to be emblematic of France’s “suburban problems”, and are often portrayed as such in the press. Here, again, it is typical for euphemisms to be used for ethnic involvement in social problems, since, whenever these so-called “suburban problems” are mentioned, everyone knows that “immigrants” account for a large proportion of the population in these areas and will assume that they are also responsible for many of these so-called “problems”.

divisions that might develop in a local context in which the disastrous social and economic situation is shared by all¹⁴. And, finally, another reason lies, of course, in the fact that these - urban and social - definitions are, as we have already noted, the only ones that are both legal and legitimate and are, therefore, the ones that everyone in a position of authority prefers to use.

When actually questioned about this issue, and sometimes even spontaneously, people nevertheless come up with other, widely differing, definitions, that may be based on nationality (Algerians, Comoro Islanders, etc.), geography (Maghrebis, Asians, etc.), culture and ethnic group (gypsies, Arabs, “North Africans” (“*beurs*”), etc.), or religion (Moslems, etc.). We shall come back to this point later (see Section 4.4).

2.3 The institutional genesis of the Grand Littoral project

There have been various urban development and restructuring projects in Marseilles since the Second World War.

It would appear that the plan to set up a shopping centre and facilities on this piece of industrial wasteland, occupied by a shantytown, dates back to the mid-1980s. The property investment company, Tréma, which is part of a major mutual insurance company¹⁵, identified this huge area, which covers 105 hectares and whose road infrastructure is currently being improved, as a potential development site. Whereas the municipal authority of Marseilles, at that time headed by a leading Socialist and former minister, wanted to make the most of the land and breath new life into this poor, outlying area of the city, the promoter presented a more ambitious project than the one originally envisaged. Tréma proposed the construction of a major shopping complex, the establishment of a wildlife park that would serve the entire region¹⁶, and the provision of various facilities. This project had the advantage of creating both activities and jobs, as well as boosting municipal finances with extra resources through taxation (particularly the tax paid by enterprises). The shopping complex was to include a hypermarket, Continent, which is part of the Promodès Group which specialises in retail distribution.

The legal form chosen for the project was that of a “Zone d’Aménagement Concertée” [ZAC - Collaborative Development Zone], in this case, “ZAC Saint André”, funded predominantly by private capital. This form brings together the various private and public partners involved in a project, with shared responsibilities and funding, bills and concertation procedures, etc.

The project therefore increasingly took the form of an urban development scheme rather than the simple establishment of commercial activities and facilities, in an environment deeply affected by the economic and social crisis. It was set up in a context already marked by the adoption of “municipal policy” measures to tackle social and urban problems in the Quartiers-Nord. Since then, other measures that are part of the same approach but are of broader scope

¹⁴ The Front National, which is very active in South-East France, is trying to fuel the “ethnic divide”. Nevertheless, this party of the extreme Right still managed to secure 27.5% of the vote in these districts in the first round of the 1988 municipal elections and recently took control of two neighbouring towns (Marignane and then Vitrolles), to add to the two it already controls in the South-East of France.

¹⁵ Mutuelle d’Assurance des Commerçants et Industriels de France [MACIF - Mutual Insurance Company for Commercial and Industrial Enterprises in France]. It would seem that Tréma has recently been sold to the North American group, HINES (see Glossary).

¹⁶ Because of a lack of “takers”, the construction of this park has been indefinitely postponed.

have also come into play, such as the Grand Project Urbain de Marseille [Marseilles Major Urban Project - GPU], which includes ZAC Saint André¹⁷.

This gradual change of scale has caused concern and led to the adoption of differing positions, particularly, depending on political allegiances, among elected local officials. But it has also raised hopes, particularly as regards employment.

In the beginning, some people saw this dangling of goods under the very noses of people who could not afford them as pure provocation. They talked of “*building a Las Vegas in the midst of the poor*” and predicted disorder and confrontation, including ethnic rioting¹⁸. Concern about the Grand Littoral project leading to job losses in local shops and services continues to this day (some calculations suggest that some 1200 jobs will be lost in the long term), and is perhaps at the root of the decision to reduce the number of shops and facilities originally planned. Also, when the project was first publicised, elected officials talked about the creation of several thousand jobs, many of them for local people, thus raising people’s hopes out of all proportion.

Even before the building site opened, the scheme has proved to be a difficult one. As a result of “heavy” pressure from unemployed people from neighbouring estates (see below), the promoter tried to take steps to help the shopping centre to “fit in” with its environment. Marseilles’ Quartiers-Nord have a reputation that gives rise to images of conflict: “*we knew, right from the start, that we were going to be working in a difficult district. But there was a great deal of ignorance, because we all came from Paris. We had all sorts of hellish images of the place, nightmarish fantasies, as if the site were in East Jerusalem and we were going to be building under the protection of the police, the army, tanks!*”

These contradictory perceptions, the “effects of publicity” and the rumours that accompanied this project led to a situation verging on the theatrical - a spectacular stage-set (a vast building site set amidst housing estates and overlooking the sea), a complicated and troubled public stage, numerous actors, an institutional “montage” of the division of powers and responsibilities leaving the populations concerned more or less in the position of spectator..., provoking a series of unexpected new developments, misunderstandings, stage entries and dialogues..., but also giving the impression of an unedited script.

¹⁷ See footnote 11 above. A GPU is a project that combines urban renewal, local development and the improvement of the image of districts facing severe problems. It is conducted by the State, in association with local authorities. Of the 12 GPUs adopted in 1994, that of Marseilles is the largest and most densely populated (see INSEE-PACA, 1996).

¹⁸ Since the early 1980s, urban riots have occasionally occurred in outlying districts where there are considerable numbers of young people without either jobs or qualifications and where unemployment rates are high. Although many young people of foreign origin have taken part in these riots, it is usually felt that their numbers among rioters simply reflect their presence in these areas.

2.4 Before the grand opening: the socio-political context ¹⁹

More than ten years passed between the initial study phase and the actual opening of the shopping centre. During this period, the political map of Marseilles²⁰ underwent radical change, with the most recent municipal elections bringing victory for the Right, which had for decades been in opposition. The significance of the Grand Littoral project obviously had a considerable impact on the elections that took place during this period.

Until the local elections of 1995, Marseilles' Quartiers-Nord had been represented at central City Hall by members belonging to the municipal majority, i.e. Socialist. As a result of the most recent elections, the Socialists lost control of the municipality to the Right, whilst the two local town halls representing the Quartiers-Nord fell into the hands of the Communists. This means, that for the first time in many years, the Quartiers-Nord are now represented by a party that is in opposition to the municipal majority.

The current Mayor of Marseilles (on the Right) and the Mayor of the *arrondissement* (Communist) have both inherited a project to which they were initially opposed for reasons both similar and different. After being elected in 1995, the Mayor of Marseilles actually tried to put a stop to work on the site, but had to give up this idea because of the prohibitive cost involved. Because of the political impossibility of restricting the programme to facilities for local residents and because of fears that the shopping centre would fail, the Mayor of the *arrondissement* took the position of supporting local people's demands and acting as moderator for them, using his weight in favour of local employment. Overall, however, elected municipal officials kept their distance from negotiations between the parties involved, as did all the local authorities. Highly reticent about the whole project, they were generally little involved and little was asked of them, apart from signing a few initial agreements and agreements of principle, which were quickly overtaken by events.

As early as 1993, the municipal team then in power had signed an agreement with the promoter to promote the employment of local residents of the Quartiers-Nord at the future shopping centre. The former Mayor of the area had then announced that a large number of jobs would be available and asked local people to send their applications direct to the local town Hall. This promise that, so we are told, thousands of jobs would be available, led to the arrival of several thousand applications ("whole post-office sacks full of them"). The Town Hall had no way of dealing with them all and the small "employment office" set up by Tréma and the central municipal authorities was immediately overloaded. This call for applicants clearly raised "*some wild hopes*" among local people, who were - and some of them still are - convinced they would be given jobs, whatever their standard of education, skills, age, etc. It also led to some extreme confusion between the number of people who were going to work at the shopping centre and the number of jobs actually created by the centre.

¹⁹ We shall not give a detailed account of events between 1994 and the opening of the Grand Littoral shopping centre. It seems important to stress, however, that the exemplary nature of the procedure used for recruiting staff for Continent is directly linked to the complicated and conflict-ridden phase right at the beginning, when the centre was actually being built. In fact, we feel that what emerges here is that it is a direct consequence of that phase.

²⁰ Marseilles is divided into 16 *arrondissements* and into electoral districts. *Arrondissements* 15 and 16 belong to electoral district 8.

However, before it could be opened, the shopping centre had to be built. The construction phase, which lasted nearly three years, was virtually ignored and left to the sole responsibility of the promoter and the enterprises involved, as is usually the case with private ZACs.

All the people we spoke to were quite categorical on this point - that it was precisely because of lobbying by local people during the construction phase that formal procedures were defined, giving significant qualitative and quantitative preference to the recruitment of “locals” to work at the Grand Littoral shopping centre.

At the outset, neither the promoter, the municipal or administrative authorities nor the enterprises involved had, despite the spectacular nature of this phase, prepared any recruitment or training plan for the benefit of local people, who were nonetheless duly categorised as severely “disadvantaged”. Consequently, nobody seems to have foreseen their revolt - particularly on the part of the residents of neighbouring estates, who had been promised there would be plenty of work for them - against the development of this enormous building site, from which they seemed unable to draw any direct benefit nor any foreseeable advantages.

- **The building site and the first actions by local people**

The area concerned, an old tile-works situated just below two public housing estates - La Bricarde and Plan d’Aou²¹ - was occupied by the “La Lorette shantytown”. About 40 families were living there and, to rehouse them, a small housing estate, still called La Lorette, was built on the edge of the main building site. A third housing estate, La Castellane, which is the largest estate in the area, was also close to the building site. This meant that several thousands of people were able to witness the preparatory work “with their own eyes”. For 14 months, before the main construction work began, earth-moving vehicles shifted several million cubic metres of earth to prepare the site for construction work. Entire families were still living on this huge building site²². This meant that the initial phase had to combine earth-moving work with the construction of 40 houses and the transfer of families into their new homes.

The enterprises working on the site, through all the stages of earth-moving, construction work and finishing, did not feel bound by the promises that had been made by the outgoing municipal council and seem to have been unaware of the context in which they were working. Successful tenderers in private invitations to tender, that is, free of any clauses concerning the “highest social bidder”²³, virtually all of them arrived on site with their own workers or used their usual sub-contractors, especially since some of them were in serious financial difficulty.

When, during 1993 and 1994, the residents of the neighbouring housing estates saw the first earth-moving work begin, they were all the more frustrated to see workers from other regions arriving to work on the site - not only people from outside Marseilles, but even

²¹ The Plan d’Aou housing estate is also due to be demolished over the next few years (see “Le Provençal, 22 February 1997).

²² Earth-moving work began in 1993 and the last ten families moved off the site in September 1995.

²³ In the case of public building sites, these clauses make it possible to impose employment “quotas” for young people and/or the unemployed,

“foreigners”: “there were even ‘Italians’ and ‘Portuguese’ working there, and yet there were no jobs for us”²⁴, we were told, just recently, by a member of a local residents’ association.

Very quickly, a “disorganization” committee was set up on each of the neighbouring housing estates, giving rise to (sometimes violent) incidents to force enterprises to take on local people: “Everyone queued up, taking it in turns to ask why they had hired people from other housing estates but nobody from ours”²⁵. People from La Lorette, for example, demanded legal compensation for the change in their environment²⁶. This one-upmanship amongst the housing estates took the enterprises involved completely by surprise.

Tréma was responsible for co-ordinating the various actors involved. The public authorities took Tréma to task for the relative opacity of recruitment and hiring procedures and the huge confusion that reigned on site. For its part, Tréma seems to have passed responsibility for these issues on to the enterprises involved.

Towards the end of March 1995 and following many skirmishes, the young people on one of the committees, who were quickly joined by their counterparts from the other estates, occupied the site and vandalised it, ending up by setting fire to the site huts. It was at this point that the public authorities - particularly as a result of the urgings of the Deputy Prefect of Marseilles - decided to take direct action. Hoping to put an end to the anarchy that reigned on the site and, what is more, wishing to preserve public order and safety, which were clearly at risk, the authorities suggested mediation between the residents’ committees (supported by the CGT) and the various enterprises and groups of enterprises, and imposed arbitration.

Before local people took action, the building site therefore opened just like any private site, without any particular concertation or coordination between the promoter and the enterprises involved, between the enterprises themselves, or between the promoter, the enterprises and the public authorities. This is why, for example, the local Bougainville office of the Agence Nationale pour l’Emploi [National Employment Agency], which covers the Quartiers-Nord, was not involved in the drawing-up of contracts of employment, some of which were signed directly by enterprises and local residents.

- **Action by the public services**

This was the context in which the meetings described as “*sort of performing the function of collective therapy*”, or even “*catharsis*”, were organised at the Prefecture and attended by the promoter, the public authorities - particularly officers from the Direction Départementale du Travail et de l’Emploi [DDTE - Departmental Directorate of Labour and Employment], the

²⁴ One of the peculiar features of this enormous building site was that it had just one entrance. This meant that the various local committees could easily check the registration plates of any incoming vehicles and, especially, could easily block entry to the site: just two or three activists were quite sufficient to disrupt the whole site.

²⁵ Another of the people we spoke to said: “You know, people here aren’t like the ones at La Castellane or La Bricarde. They think differently...”

²⁶ This claim was to some extent legitimate, since site work for the TGV tunnel opened right in the middle of the La Castellane housing estate. “Of course, the entry shaft was right on their mini-football pitch in the middle of the estate. As compensation, they secured jobs for 15 people and an undertaking to provide training for 15 others. The promise of training was only partially fulfilled” (interview with G Hermier, Member of Parliament and Mayor of the 15th and 16th *arrondissements*).

manager of the Continent hypermarket (main employer) and representatives of the district committees. The Prefecture, the symbolic seat of power and of the State's power of intervention - an institution with which local people, and especially second-generation immigrants, have a relationship which is at the least distant and in some cases distrustful - thus became a place of regulation and concertation, where some "ground rules" were gradually developed. To use the words of one of the people we interviewed, it was accepted by everyone concerned as "*a place of recognition of Republican legitimacy*" and a "*validating point of reference*". Even now, "meetings at the Prefecture" are still an instrument of regulation that makes it possible to overcome various misunderstandings among the protagonists²⁷.

Initially, it was agreed that "direct" recruitment on the site, which was causing rivalry and conflict, should be halted and that vacancies should be notified to the ANPE in Bougainville. But, apart from the sub-contracting enterprises taken on by Continent to do internal work, very few of the protagonists actually respected this agreement at the time: on the one hand, local residents continued to try to secure jobs by pressuring enterprises, either individually or in small groups (attempts to sabotage plant, and even much more direct threats)²⁸; on the other hand, using the argument of technical constraints, enterprises continued to bring in workers from other parts of France, thus provoking anger and an immediate response from neighbouring residents.

During the same period, the Inspection du Travail [Labour Inspectorate] identified an increasing number of breaches of labour law²⁹ and "*evasions of health and safety regulations*" on the site, though it did not succeed in imposing an overall site-management plan on the enterprises working together on the site or in identifying a common spokesperson³⁰.

Nobody seemed able to cope with the situation - not the neighbouring residents, supported and represented by trade-union organisations, who were demanding jobs; not the local authorities - the municipal council and public labour and employment services - who were no longer able to "*pour oil on the waters*"; not the main contractor and construction enterprises, whose main concern was to put an end to the delays; and finally and above all, not the future occupants of the shopping centre, starting with Continent, who were beginning to doubt whether the centre would ever open or be a viable proposition.

²⁷ For example, in September 1996, just before the shopping centre opened, a public round table bringing together the GPU employment committee, the Deputy Prefect of Marseilles, the manager of Continent, elected officials, trade unions and committees of unemployed people was held to assess Continent's performance in terms of recruitment and to set up concertation procedures concerning employment for residents of the Quartiers-Nord, within the framework of the new municipal policy provisions (Zone Franche, jobs for local people, etc.).

²⁸ Such as, "*if you don't give me a job, I'll kill you*" - a threat made, so it seems, by one of the "leaders", who immediately got what he was asking for.

²⁹ With more than 350 breaches being identified during 1995.

³⁰ When the Inspection de Travail ordered that work be halted on one part of the site for safety reasons, work teams simply moved to another part: "*enterprises worked around site stoppages and, in the end, stoppages had absolutely no effect*".

It was at this point that the Inspection du Travail took firm action. Towards the end of August 1995, when its inspectors had, according to one of our interviewees, identified 15-20 fatal accident risks in just two hours, it decided to instigate a relatively little used judicial procedure that potentially implied total closure of the site³¹.

This action taken by the public authorities forced enterprises to improve health and safety conditions on the site, but it also showed them that health and safety also depended on the recruitment of local people, monitored by the public services, to put an end to the harassment of site occupations and vandalism. This action therefore made it possible for tensions to be released, since it led to enterprises accepting that job vacancies and applications be processed centrally and transparently by the Agence Locale pour l'Emploi [Local Employment Agency]: *“Undeclared employment on the site disappeared (...) Everyone knew who had been hired and why and under what conditions they had been hired”*, one of the committee leaders told us, adding that *“every unemployed person on the housing estate has at some time or another worked on the site”*. It is, however, extremely difficult to get hold of any figures on the volume of recruitment³².

It was in this framework that the principle of “local preference for recruitment” was adopted by the various protagonists, in exchange for cessation of the sporadic occupations and acts of violence on the site. For their part, the public employment services undertook to ensure that this principle was respected and to monitor its application, which required monitoring of the job market. This undertaking prompted all the partners to agree to make the public employment service’s regulatory role official - a role that had until then been only unofficially recognised. More importantly, however, this “taking of power” allowed for a “positive discrimination” policy and procedures to be put in place at local level, with the State’s blessing: *“ordinary law was waived to allow for the provision of special services and the introduction of procedures that are not applied anywhere else in France (...), with a specific view to integration or, if you prefer, positive discrimination”*.

The generalised pressure applied by the public employment services because of the problems that had occurred on the site (occupations and disputes, on the one hand, and health and safety at work, on the other) thus led to the formulation of some general “ground rules” - rules that were then applied to the recruitment of staff for the shopping centre and, in particular, of staff for the Continent hypermarket, which we shall describe below (see Chapter3).

³¹ This quite complicated procedure, known as “référé d’heure à heure” [hour-by-hour injunction], has been used only very rarely in France. Although the case was eventually thrown out by the judge, it nonetheless led to the site being closed down for 24 hours.

³² According to the promoter, *“In all, the site will have generated 2 135 000 hours of work (excluding earth-moving work). Some 10% of the people who have worked on the site were taken on especially for this project. It is mostly local residents who have been recruited for the project”*. See Tréma, press release, *Emploi*, 19 July 1997, File 2-A.

- **The gradual definition of shared objectives**

The main concern of the Tréma Group was, of course, to ensure that the centre was built and available for occupation (sale or leasing of shops) with the minimum of delay and incident. But there was also a question of image. The Tréma Group specialises in the launch of commercial enterprises and, with the Grand Littoral project being its major investment, its professional reputation was dependent upon the success of the project. Since Marseilles' shopping centres cater only partially for residents of the Quartiers-Nord, it was vital that these residents accept the new centre and that peace reign in the area, so that the well-off shoppers of Marseilles and the surrounding area, who were the real target of the new centre, felt comfortable about visiting the new shopping centre. Challenged and forced into action during the construction phase, the Tréma Group became aware of the social and political issues at play and had to enter into commitments that went well beyond its 1993 agreement with the municipal authorities. Demonstrating, according to several of our interviewees, a pragmatic approach, the Group drew up a "Charte Emploi" [Employment Charter] covering the Grand Littoral project, which all retailers wanting to open outlets at the centre were asked to sign, and under which they undertook "*provided they have the appropriate skills and abilities, to give priority for jobs to people living in districts close to the Grand Littoral shopping Centre*" (Article 1), and, with regard to all recruitment, "*first to consult the Comité de Coordination Emploi [Employment Coordination Committee] (...), the special body responsible for guiding and co-ordinating all activities concerning employment in the area covered by the programme (...)*" (Article 2).

This charter is not a contract in the strict sense, but a sort of moral undertaking. To date, 110 owners and managers of the 178 shops of various sizes in the centre have signed it. Quite recently, the Tréma Group has taken action to secure compliance with these clauses on the construction site of the UGC cinema complex (15 screens, with seating for 2500). Construction work on this site is currently in progress and there have been further incidents of "undeclared" recruitment (see Section 4.4 below). However, overall, the Tréma Group now seems to be playing a less central role in this project, except as regards the management of shared facilities, cleaning services and, particularly, security (which it subcontracts to enterprises that comply with the charter).

The enterprises that had secured tenders and were working on the site seemed disconcerted by the force of local reaction and the mobilisation of public bodies, and seem to have felt they were being "held hostage" for issues that were nothing to do with them. Some of them tried to get out of this difficult situation in ways that simply aggravated it: direct recruitment more or less under threat, use of undeclared labour, etc. Their frequent economic problems also prompted them to adopt apparently tortuous solutions, such as turning to a temporary work agency for work that had been scheduled for a long time³³. In the end, however, their errors made it possible to reach a better definition of the restrictions that needed to be respected with regard to recruitment.

For Continent, the risks were greater still, since they concerned not only the preparatory phase preceding the grand opening (risks of theft, delays, etc.) but also the future. The security of the shop in the long term (or, at least, for long enough to ensure a return on the investment) was of considerable importance. As we have already said, many suburban hypermarkets are like

³³ The sudden arrival of 200 bricklayers to build block walls, for example, stunned the public employment services, which could have offered local candidates, at less cost to the enterprise.

“fortified camps”, trying to repel local residents and, especially, gangs of youths, who are attracted by the extraordinary profusion of goods on display at these centres, “*which have become a sort of adventure playground where the cycle of provocation and repression can be seen in its full glory. It is often at shopping centres of this kind that urban riots begin*”. In this context, it was absolutely essential that the Quartiers-Nord - often seen as a centre of anarchy, where petty crime is the main occupational activity - be “neutralised”. The hypermarket’s management became very quickly aware of this and, as we shall see, used all its weight as the main employer at the shopping centre to ensure that a general rule of “local preference” for recruitment was established and obeyed. Generally speaking, most of the actors involved credit Continent’s management with undoubted “*good intentions*”. Its individual recruitment activities are studied in the following chapter.

For residents of *arrondissements* 15 and 16, it was a “matter of vital importance”. Those of neighbouring *arrondissements*, whose employment situation was certainly not any better but who were a “lesser priority” nonetheless heard the promises that were being made and saw the shopping centre as their only hope of finding work.

The recruitment of local people was also highly symbolic, in that it helped to change their image and the reputation of the estates on which they lived. Given their bad reputation, they had to demonstrate not only their basic willingness to work but also their ability to hold down a job and prove their worth.

For all that, it would be wrong to assume that these residents form an homogeneous group, with a unanimous sense of sharing common interests as regards the success or failure of the whole operation. Rivalry and antagonism are rife among the residents of neighbouring estates. Many of the residents of other “peripheral” *arrondissements*, socially similar but administratively “excluded” or treated less well by the procedures set in place, said they felt they had been “duped” (see Le Provençal, February 1997). No figures or statistics seem able to dispel this belief. Whatever the case, over the past few months, young people from these other *arrondissements* have been stepping up their actions, which range from occupying churches to occupying the Central Town Hall, to secure jobs.

Between local residents, politicians and employment professionals there is a specific group, more or less associated with trade-union organisations. Or, more precisely, with the CGT, since the other trade unions took little part in the actions undertaken in the area. The debate within the CGT was a complicated one: it is not usual for a trade union that calls for class solidarity to accept geographical preference and to waive the principle of the valuing of occupational skills. To substitute “locality” for skills during the recruitment process was not an easy choice, especially since the tradition of the occupational trade unions is still strong within these organisations.

It was only gradually, as stoppages and occupations of the site continued, that the challenges for the public employment and labour authorities emerged. Little accustomed to playing the role of “*fire-fighters*”, these authorities were faced with an extraordinary situation. It was under the cover of “municipal policy” that they were spurred into action and prompted to collaborate more closely than usual, thus demonstrating their ability to take action to settle disputes, both open and latent, and, on a broader scale, to serve as intermediaries. Their engagement in the issue also faced them with the challenge of proving themselves in an area in which their involvement is often disputed: setting up and implementing a recruitment procedure

(“*a global service*”) as well as, and even better than, a private service-provider, which would certainly not have been able, according to the public authorities, to guarantee “*balance*” and “*social harmony*” or manipulate public employment-aid systems.

- **Defining a method and changing attitudes**

These varied and divergent interests finally came together in the adoption of a procedure that was generally approved by all, though only after many events and much bargaining and only after everyone had adjusted their initial stances, normal demands and usual way of going about things.

The residents of the Quartiers-Nord, for example, had to acknowledge that there would not be as many jobs for them as they had hoped and that unequal treatment in their favour had to be “equal” among them, which implied a certain attenuation of their usual rivalries. They also had to accept monitoring by the authorities of the “*transparency*” of recruitment. Their capacity for action (or “*nuisance value*”) was thus channelled into monitoring respect of these undertakings - a point on which they are still highly vigilant.

Entrepreneurs and retailers had to agree to give up some of their recruitment prerogatives in return for social harmony, and to accept that public institutions would not only be providing services but also playing a mediating role.

The case of Continent is even more illustrative of these changes in attitude, since management not only complied with the “*local preference*” procedure but also, as we shall see, agreed to change its usual recruitment mechanisms and criteria.

The public employment service set itself up as the regulatory centre and “*won back a market*”, since it has been empowered to receive and process all job offers and applications, present and future, associated with the Grand Littoral Shopping Centre. To achieve this, it had to guarantee that, provided the “*ground rules*” were respected, everything would be set up in such a way as to ensure that everyone benefited: that local residents would be guaranteed “*local preference*” as regards recruitment; that enterprises would be able to pursue and complete their work on the building site in the best possible conditions; and that the promoter and retailers would see the centre up and running, without risk of incidents.

Above all, however, the public employment service had really to look at its traditional methods and, as one of its officers told us, go through “*a cultural revolution*”. The introduction of “*procedures that are not applied anywhere else in France (...) meant that we had to work in a new and different way. For example, working in close proximity with public inspectors working in the same area is relatively rare for the training and inspection services. And even rarer still - and this is perhaps the only example - was seeing such clear, close, on-going collaboration between an officer of the Direction Départementale de l'Emploi and the Agence Nationale pour l'Emploi (...)*”.

Certainly the mediation work helped to ensure that, when a landslide during the night of 6-7 November 1995 almost engulfed the school situated below the building site and damaged several houses on the new La Lorette estate, local people's reactions were, all things considered, relatively moderate. This incident, which, just four months before the centre was due to open, could have taken a dramatic turn, had a more indirect, but nonetheless central,

impact on the people of Marseilles' image of the Grand Littoral project. The whole project has, in fact, been a real source of fascination. Pride at the thought of having the largest shopping centre in Europe blends with a subtle fear that is partly due to the feeling that it is all "transient", that one day it will all disappear, that it might be engulfed by a landslide... but also, and perhaps more than anything else, to the area in which it is located. The project is constantly rumoured to have failed - a rumour that is fed by a sense of insecurity, by all the "did-you-hears" about all the incidents, thefts, deaths even, and that nothing and no-one seems, at the moment, to be able to do anything about³⁴.

Another consequence of this incident was that it delayed the opening of the shopping centre for several months and had an impact on the development of recruitment procedures, as we shall describe later.

³⁴ During our stay in Marseilles, every time we mentioned our work on the site, whoever we were speaking to would tell us a new, disturbing tale, which, of course, always came from a very reliable source. This is a very classic case of rumour, as analysed by sociologists and psychologists (Kapferer, 1995).

STAFF RECRUITMENT AND TRAINING POLICY AT CONTINENT

3.1 Formal agreements

The first agreement linking the partners, right at the beginning of the process of recruiting staff for the shopping centre, is the national agreement between the Promodès Group, to which the Continent chain belongs, and the Fondation Agir contre l'Exclusion [FACE]. The aim of this foundation is to encourage those who have the resources to include "*the most disadvantaged members of society*" in their projects, by setting up special occupational integration programmes. Since it does not itself have sufficient human or structural resources, FACE depends on a network of economic agents and on local associations and neighbourhood structures - and makes use of public services, which it nonetheless judges to be fairly useless in this area - to support its actions. In Marseilles, its "relay point" is a sort of enterprise club, the Centre D'Action Économique [CAE - Economic Action Centre], which was set up several years ago by one of the foundation's members.

As soon as they arrived in the Quartiers-Nord, Continent's managers contacted the CAE to plan an "*action citoyenne*" [citizens' action] for disadvantaged people. A contract between Continent-Grand Littoral and this operational arm of FACE in Marseilles was signed in February 1995. For FACE, this contract included running a training programme for Continent managers, entitled "*Sensibilisation à la problématique des Quartiers-Nord de Marseilles*" [Raising awareness of the problems of Marseilles' Quartiers-Nord], and selecting very disadvantaged people from the Quartiers-Nord, providing them with initial training to improve their chances of being employed at Continent and monitoring their progress both before and after recruitment. For its part, Continent undertook to recruit 10% of the total number of staff it expected to take on (600 workers) from among those put forward by FACE at the end of this training programme³⁵, and to take them on under permanent contracts covered by ordinary law (see Glossary) and provide them with follow-up training.

This action in Marseilles seems to be the first of its kind - or at least, the first of such scope - to be undertaken by FACE. It would seem that opinions of it vary because of problems concerning cooperation and stepping on the toes of the public services - problems whose consequences do not seem to have reached their end. On the other hand, FACE was willing to mediate very actively, since it wanted to ensure that the action was effective and prove its own validity and effectiveness.

However, as we have already seen, no action had been taken to ensure that local people were employed on the building site and, as soon as he arrived, Continent's managing director noted that: "*the construction enterprise that won the contract (...) had come up against some difficulties because account had not been taken of certain features concerning the social environment and employment in the area*".

³⁵ Another clause, not discussed here, concerned identifying young school-leavers in the Quartiers-Nord to encourage them to undertake on-the-job training at a Continent store in another town or region.

The managing director himself took steps, as the principal, to force the enterprises who were doing internal work on the store to recruit local people, via the Agence Locale pour l'Emploi in Bougainville. Some 30 people from the nearby estates were then employed by these enterprises as temporary labourers. Afterwards, these people found themselves back on the unemployment register, without having received any further training.

At the same time, the promoter, Tréma, became involved in the process of cooperation with the Agence Locale pour l'Emploi to promote the recruitment of Quartiers-Nord residents on the building site and in the future shopping centre. This is the line taken up by the Charte Emploi Grand Littoral that we mentioned earlier.

Aware that this was certainly not enough to satisfy the demands of local committees, the managing director also contacted the GPU's Mission-Emploi to define some form of cooperation. An initial agreement with the Agence Locale pour l'Emploi in Bougainville made provision for the establishment of a "one-stop-shop" for recruitment - in addition and without calling into question, it should be borne in mind, the agreement with FACE. A close partnership between Continent and the staff of the Agence Locale pour l'Emploi gradually led, step by step, to the definition of a recruitment procedure and the prerogatives of each of the partners concerned. Throughout the negotiations preceding the opening of the shopping centre, Continent's management fought to ensure that everyone involved followed these common ground rules that it had helped to define.

This deliberate adoption of "local positive discrimination", monitored and validated by the public services, is now serving as a "reproducible" model: a national framework agreement between the Continent chain and ANPE, which reproduces the essential features of the procedure we describe below, was signed in September 1996.

3.2 The role of Fondation Agir contre l'Exclusion [FACE]

The contract signed between Continent-Grand Littoral and FACE's operational arm in Marseilles comprised two main lines of action: the training of Continent managers; and the selection and training of people who had "*serious difficulties*" before being employed by Continent, who were to account for 10% of all staff.

- **The training of Continent managers**

The supermarket's managerial staff, recruited by internal transfer within the Group, received "targeted" training provided partly by FACE and partly by the Chambre de Commerce et d'Industrie de Marseille [Marseilles Chamber of Trade and Industry]. The idea was to make managerial staff familiar with the hypermarket's economic, social and cultural context, that is, with its environment, but also with its future employees. According to the hypermarket's manager, it was particularly necessary, if the project was to be a success, to "*motivate them to cope with the challenge represented by the integration of local residents of the Quartiers-Nord, with their combination of various origins, educational levels and cultures*". One of the objectives was also to encourage them to "adapt" their "classic" management methods to these "atypical" workers, that is, as one member of the managerial team put it: "*population groups that were certainly somewhat more difficult than the ones we were used to working with in our more traditional stores*".

We cannot reproduce the training programme here, since it was not provided. It would seem, according to the managerial staff concerned, that they were given a history of the “cosmopolitan city” of Marseilles in general, and of the Quartiers-Nord in particular, from the 1960s to the present day. The “*problems raised by these districts*” - to use the title of the training programme - really captured their attention. Some of them remember having discovered “*the local people, their behaviour and attitudes, their automatic responses and reflex reactions*”. Others, or perhaps the same ones, learned “*how these districts work, with their gangs of young people*” or “*what was going on in the hidden economy*”. The sessions devoted to the gypsies and Islam also seem to have interested them. Inter-ethnic relations between minority groups particularly caught their attention: “*we were told a little about the gypsies’ attitude to Maghrebis*”. Some managers drew principles from this: “*you cannot mix certain population groups*” because “*with these people, if you make them work together, it’s going to come to a bad end sooner or later*”, and, therefore, “*it is better to keep them carefully apart to avoid this kind of problem ever arising*”.

This emergence of the “ethnic” issue in the training of managerial staff, in however limited a fashion and despite the risk of stereotyped interpretations, is a real exception to the rule. It is presented as a “matter of fact”, but is knowledge reserved for the “elite”, who can be expected to show some tolerance for cultural diversity and its various manifestations. Everywhere, or almost everywhere, else, the issue is fudged, with ethnic minorities being lumped under the category of “difficult” or “excluded” population groups.

- **The hiring of 58 people “with serious difficulties”**

The “*combating exclusion*” aspect of the Continent-FACE agreement concerned the employment of unskilled people, who were deemed to have “serious difficulties”. The agreed selection criteria were:

1. the person must have “*little hope of getting a job*”, that is, must be barely “*employable*”, because of inadequate training, long-term unemployment, lack of any work experience, etc.;
2. the person must be resident, in order of priority, in one of the four public housing estates closest to the shopping centre, or in the 15th or 16th *arrondissement*, or, at least, in Marseilles.

FACE openly asserts the notion of “positive discrimination” for “excluded” population groups, on the one hand, by making enterprises aware of the need to become a part of their environment and to participate in integration measures and, on the other, by seeking out the often underestimated potential of unskilled jobseekers.

In this case, a list of 212 jobseekers known either by the social services or the public employment services, or selected by FACE, was drawn up in accordance with the criteria outlined above. On the basis of their curriculum vitae and following an interview with FACE workers, 131 people were selected. For various reasons, 41 of these were later eliminated.

Believing that some of them would not be able to follow the training course or would fail to reach the required level (which proved not to be the case, since only two dropped out), FACE finally selected 90 people. These candidates had been put forward by various structures: a

public body responsible for aiding jobseekers with serious difficulties; the Plan d'Insertion par l'Économique de Marseilles (PLIE - see Glossary); management systems concerning the Revenu Minimum d'Insertion (RMI - see Glossary); social centres, and FACE, which also contacted an association of immigrants from the Comoro Islands in Marseilles. Of these candidates, 80 came from the two priority *arrondissements*, including 39 from estates close to the Grand Littoral site.

These 90 people (54 women and 36 men) followed an “*initial skills/employability*” training programme formulated by FACE, financed under the PLIE and run by a training body selected on the basis of an invitation to tender. “Individual mentoring” of trainees was provided under the PLIE. This one-year programme comprised “job-start” training, special retail training and periods of work in retail enterprises.

Despite the delays caused by the landslide at the Grand Littoral site in November 1995, 58 of these 90 people were taken on “*blind*”, i.e. without having to undergo any selection tests, by Continent before the store opened; they were employed under permanent contracts, albeit only part-time, after receiving a further two to three months’ training from the enterprise. A few others were employed under temporary contracts to cover the Christmas and New Year rush at the end of 1996.

Of the 58 people recruited through FACE, 17 work on the check-out line, one works in the central cashier’s office, two are hostesses, one works in the financial products department and 37 are “general workers”, who have been assigned to the various sections of the store. While the “general workers” have the same type of contract as the others (35 hours a week), the 21 people who are employed as cashiers and hostesses have been given a 30-hour week, whereas others recruited through the Agence Nationale de l’Emploi have contracts for only 25 hours a week. These different contracts, like the rather unusual “blind” recruitment of staff pre-selected and pre-trained by FACE, have introduced a distinction between cashiers and caused some tension within the enterprise, which we shall discuss later (see Section 4.2). We also sensed in the manner of some of the managers responsible for them, a certain concealed, yet nonetheless perceptible, reluctance to consider the people recruited through FACE in the same way as other employees, either because they think they “*have received initial training that is not always either complete or exhaustive*” or because, having trained together for a year, “*they tend to stick together*” and are a bit of “*a clan*”.

3.3 Recruitment in collaboration with the Agence Locale pour l’Emploi

The requirement for transparency of recruitment made necessary by the pressure exerted by local residents and taken up by Continent, which needed official recognition of its respect of priority recruitment for residents of the Quartiers-Nord, led, as we have seen, to the entire recruitment procedure being conducted through the agency of the Agence Local pour l’Emploi in Bougainville, whose reputation improved considerably as a result. It was, therefore, well before the store opened that the procedure was devised and established.

Initially, almost two years before the expected opening date, two operations were conducted, Firstly, very detailed job descriptions of the available posts were drawn up jointly by the Agence Locale pour l’Emploi and the hypermarket’s management, which consulted its professional and managerial staff for this purpose (section heads, staff supervisors, etc.). These

were chiefly for the general workers and cashiers. Instead of formulating “classic” recruitment criteria, such as standard of education, educational qualifications, experience, etc., detailed job descriptions were very carefully drawn up. For its part, Continent reviewed the requirements it usually lays down at this stage³⁶.

At the same time, the staff of the Agence Locale pour l’Emploi drew from its files (and from the 2000 unsolicited applications sent to the municipal authorities) the names of 8500 jobseekers from the Quartiers-Nord who might be eligible for the available posts.

Between 13 and 16 November 1994, a huge public information campaign took place in the offices made available by the local town Hall and in the city centre. The 8500 people concerned were invited, in groups of 50, to attend meetings at which staff from the Agence Locale pour l’Emploi and Continent described the features of jobs in the retail sector, working hours and job descriptions relating to the various posts, the types of contract of employment being offered (part-time contracts for 25-35 hours a week), pay, etc. Participants were invited to confirm their applications, if they so wished, and to indicate the type of post in which they were interested. At the end of these meetings, Continent still had a list of 4000 hopeful applicants.

These 4000 applicants were briefly interviewed by the Agence Locale pour l’Emploi to check that they fulfilled the initial requirements (ability to read and write, willingness to start work very early in the morning or to work at night and to work on Saturdays). At the end of this stage, 3000 applicants had been approved by ANPE and their files were passed on to Continent’s management.

Continent’s management selected 1500 of these applicants and invited them all, in groups of 100, to take the enterprise’s own selection tests. These tests were of two types, the most difficult being for the post of cashier, which comprised tests of visual memory, mental arithmetic, ability to concentrate and ability to understand and apply procedures set out in writing. The other, easier type of test was for “general workers”. Twelve recruitment officers from other stores worked in shifts to conduct the tests and assess the results.

The results seem to have been better than Continent’s managers expected, particularly those of the tests for cashiers³⁷, where the success rate of more than 50% was higher than the national average (of 30-40%)³⁸.

³⁶ According to an ANPE officer, it was ANPE that altered management’s original provisions: *“In this sector of activity, methods of recruitment are often based traditionally on vocational training and occupational experience. However, by means of discussion and in view of the tension that was mounting in the local population, which would have exploded if traditional methods had been adhered to, [we told Continent]: ‘If you want this to work, if you really want your shopping centre to be a success, you will have to change your approach and, first and foremost, agree to recruit a certain percentage of the local population. And, to recruit them, you are going to have to set your recruitment criteria at a lower level’”*. At this stage, it was *“attitudes and motivation”* that were the main criteria. It would seem that the Continent chain, at national level, has since adopted the types of job description devised in conjunction with ANPE.

³⁷ The vast majority of cashiers in supermarkets are women. However, in this case, 1% of applicants for cashier posts were men. Those who were taken on were assigned to the hypermarket’s petrol station.

³⁸ This evaluation, of which we were informed by a member of Continent’s management team, was reiterated - certainly out of pride in its work, but also because of a real sense of connection with the local population - by the Agence Locale pour l’Emploi: *“The enterprise was surprised by the high calibre of the applicants put forward”*.

The applicants with the best test results were selected and interviewed by the heads of the various sections (cashier's office, grocery section, etc.), for acceptance before being hired. Everyone who was rejected was sent a personal letter and a special telephone line was set up for them, the idea being to prevent any reprisals by unsuccessful applicants: "*We sent out personal letters to avoid security problems (...) and to give a good image of Continent's recruitment procedures*". "*(...) there were a few incidents, some disappointed people, the odd threat...*". The few protests that were made were nonetheless individual rather than collective.

All the cashiers for the store were recruited in this way. For sections in which workers were required to handle goods or deal personally with customers, Continent had to look further afield, both in and outside Marseilles, for skills that seemed to be lacking in the local area - for experienced butchers and fishmongers, for example, and for after-sales-service staff.

At the end of this whole process, more than 450 people, including 220 cashiers, were recruited and began the training provided by Continent - on 19 August 1996 (for cashiers) and 2 September 1996 (for the others).

This training was provided mainly by the Chambre de Commerce et d'Industrie de Marseille, on the basis of Continent's specifications. People who were going to be employed as "general workers" or in the financial-services department were sent on on-the-job training in other Continent stores in the region. Cashiers received on-site training, which was provided by eight people sent by IBM to teach them how to use the new cash registers designed by IBM.

When the store opened, a total of 489 new staff had been hired: the vast majority of them had gone through the recruitment procedure devised jointly by the Agence Locale pour l'Emploi and Continent, while 58 of them had been recruited under the agreement between Continent and FACE.

3.4 Local preference and the recruitment of minority group members: whether or not to use the term "ethnic"

Full details are available of the addresses of all the people who were taken on by Continent at the time of their recruitment. When the store opened, 62% lived in the 15th and 16th *arrondissements*, which had been designated as priority recruitment areas, and a total of 80% lived in the Quartiers-Nord as a whole. More than 85% of all the people recruited live in Marseilles. Nearly two thirds of these new employees are working under permanent contracts, though most of them are part-time (between 25 and 35 hours a week).

Almost "by definition", no spontaneous reference is made to the "ethnic" breakdown of applicants and recruits. Very much to the fore during the training course for management staff (which they all remember well), the issue disappears, simply vanishes into thin air, when people are talking about the groups concerned, who are instead labelled as "having serious difficulties", and then comes up again a few minutes later - like an excuse or a self-justification - in conversation as a kind of "Freudian slip".

The FACE officer we interviewed clearly illustrated this double language, or rather, this two-faceted mode of expression. Questioned by us about the "ethnic origin" of the 90 people selected, he at first claimed that he was quite deliberately unaware of this, since it did not serve

as a useful point of reference: *“I really can’t answer your question, and that is something that will not change”*³⁹. And yet, almost immediately afterwards, and whilst claiming that *“it was the area and issues of integration that mattered”*, he went on to say that *“70% or 80%”* of these people were *“from the Maghreb or the Comoro Islands”*. Judging from the surnames on the list of these people, it would seem that a large majority of them are foreign.

The question does not come as such a surprise at the Agence Locale pour l’Emploi in Bougainville, but workers there are unable to answer it because they have, throughout, focused on the representative nature of the “priority” populations, that is, in ever-widening circles, residents of nearby estates, people living in the 15th and 16th *arrondissements*, residents of the Quartiers-Nord, and residents of Marseilles: *“I know that 60% of the people taken on by Continent are Quartiers-Nord residents. We know that a high percentage of people living in the Quartiers-Nord are immigrants, but I really don’t know how many immigrants there are among Continent’s new recruits (...). Only Continent would be able to tell you that”*.

So, what was Continent’s answer? A human resources officer completely evaded the question, though he was not surprised when we asked him if any reference to origin was contained on staff files⁴⁰. He told us that *“the matter was obviously raised at the time of recruitment”* but that he was not there at that time; then he said: *“we did not alter our recruitment method - the only objectives concerned the Quartiers-Nord”*. He told us that people’s ethnic origin *“is of absolutely no significance”*, but went on to say that *“it is up to them to adapt”*. Finally, he said he felt that *“immigrants respect their superiors. They are grateful. They are pleased to have been given a job”*, finally adding that *“it’s usually the local French people who cause difficulties”*.

Again and again, we observed this pussy-footing around the issue. Although managed on a day-to-day basis, discomfort around the issue is obviously increasing. Thus, one section head said: *“It’s not something we think about all the time”*, but said that you very quickly get used to *“their faces”*. And another officer simply did not know how to answer our question on ethnic diversity and asked us: *“in what sense do you mean?”*. To our answer of *“in your sense”*, he said: *“Mine? Well, I’d say that, at the moment, 12-15% of the cashiers faithfully follow their parents’ religion”*. However, he pointed out that he would not assign to the check-out a young Maghrebi woman who had henna on her hands to indicate that she had recently got married (see Chapter 4).

Most of our interviewees were perfectly aware of the fact that, without “negative” discrimination, giving priority of recruitment to residents of the Quartiers-Nord was bound to lead to the hiring of a large number of members of ethnic minorities, but chose not to focus on this and, indeed, to play it down: *“of course, there is such a majority of people who are... Respect of the geographical clause automatically led to the inclusion of..., I can’t say minorities, but, if you like, people who aren’t of French stock. Of course, that’s just the way it is...”*.

³⁹ Even though FACE clearly states that it also contacted an association of immigrants from the Comoro Islands.

⁴⁰ This practice is prohibited by the law on “data-processing, data files and liberty”.

As we said earlier (see Section 2.1), if our questions caused some discomfort, that was precisely because the ethnic origin of the (many) people who went through the recruitment procedure was systematically disregarded in favour of “local preference”. To raise the issue again is uncomfortable and upsetting and “rekindles” a subject that has deliberately and by consensus been “stamped out”.

Some people also feel that jobseekers are “*disempowered*” rather than helped if this question is asked too often. Questioned about any ethnic or racial discrimination in the recruitment procedure, one of the mediators said to us: “*I really can’t agree with that, because it is the first pretext that anyone who is of immigrant background and has not been given a job will use to conceal their disappointment (...). Even if it’s true, my task is to motivate them, not to destroy their confidence*”.

As we shall see later, the exemplary nature of this procedure, which has been acknowledged, is nonetheless relative.

CHAPTER 4

EVALUATION OF RESULTS

Although the principle of “justified discrimination” based on a geographical criterion is not entirely new in France, one of the unique features of the Grand Littoral project is that it concerns a “rare asset” that is allocated on an individual basis: employment.

4.1 A shared success

Most of our interviewees agreed that the Grand Littoral project has been a success, both in terms of the results that have been achieved as regards employment and in terms of the way in which those results have been achieved.

- **Job creation that truly benefits the people of Marseilles’ Quartiers-Nord**

According to the report presented by the project’s promoter three months after the grand opening⁴¹, 1424 people were working at the Grand Littoral Shopping Centre in February 1997. Of these, 842 had been recruited locally (392 by Continent and 450 by the other shops at the centre). To these, we have to add the 170 jobs created in service companies (security, cleaning, parks and gardens, etc.). These figures are considerably higher than the original estimate of 800 new jobs, which means that job-creation objectives have been reached and surpassed. Better still, if we are to believe the main employer, Continent, 95% of locally recruited employees were, in February 1997, covered by permanent contracts of employment. However, we need to remember that the majority of employees at the shopping centre (hypermarket and other shops) are in part-time jobs (54%), even though they did not necessarily want to work only part-time.

A high proportion of new recruits are residents of Marseilles’ 15th and 16th *arrondissements*. This is reflected in the breakdown by place of residence of people working at the shopping centre:

Table 1: Breakdown, by place of residence, of people working at the shopping centre

Total number of employees	Residents of 15 th and 16 th <i>arrondissements</i>	Other <i>arrondissements</i> of Marseilles	Outside Marseilles
1 424	508 (36%)	513 (36%)	403 (28%)

⁴¹ Grand Littoral (1997), report drawn up three months after the opening of the Grand Littoral Shopping Centre. Press file. Agence MCM Consultants, 4/2.

Although the figures concerning jobs at the shopping centre are a little vague and open to dispute, the breakdown of recruitment by Continent is particularly illuminating. Of the 392 people recruited locally, 59% are residents of the 15th and 16th *arrondissements*, 75% are residents of the Quartiers-Nord as a whole (15th, 16th, 13th, 14th, 2nd and 3rd *arrondissements*), and 83% are residents of Marseilles (all *arrondissements*).

A wish to give priority, provided they had the appropriate skills, to the people of Marseilles in general and residents of local estates in particular made it possible to offer job access to people who, in many cases, bear the stigma of living in the Quartiers-Nord and who often bear the additional “ethnic” stigma associated with their origin (Maghreb, Comoro Islands, Asia, etc.), even though most of them, so it would seem, are of French nationality.

Although account needs to be taken of job losses in small local shops that have suffered as a result of the opening of the Grand Littoral Shopping Centre, the project has nonetheless led to the creation of several hundred stable jobs, which have, by preference, been given to residents of some of Marseilles’ most marginalised districts. To these, we need to add several tens of temporary jobs created during the various phases of the construction process and that continue to be created during peak shopping periods (Christmas and New Year, etc.).

In addition to this “positive discrimination” on the basis of place of residence, Continent has also reserved some 60 jobs for people who have serious difficulty in gaining access to employment (people in receipt of RMI, the long-term unemployed, single mothers without resources, etc.), and who are required to undertake initial and occupational training before being given a job. The 59 people that have been taken on via this special procedure are also all residents of the Quartiers-Nord.

- **Seeking transparency in recruitment policy**

The construction of a consumer paradise right at the heart of an area that is being so badly affected by the current economic crisis was a real gamble and, in order for it to pay off, its promoters needed to prove beyond all doubt that it would also be of benefit to the local population. Without that evidence, the whole project would have seemed like pure provocation.

Furthermore, the extravagant promises of jobs made by some elected local officials, even before site work had begun and in the purest vote-catching tradition (some spoke in terms of 2500 new jobs), were an aggravating circumstance.

In this context, the number of jobs actually on offer was bound to be insufficient to meet the expectations that had been created. This meant that it was extremely important, on the one hand, that all the data on the issue be made clearly and publicly available and, on the other, that recruitment criteria and selection mechanisms be as transparent as possible. In this respect, and whatever its limitations, the procedure used to recruit Continent staff has some innovative aspects:

- the recruitment procedure was characterised by an effort to inform all the jobseekers concerned, by detailed job descriptions for each post available that were based not on qualification levels but on a clear description of the skills required, and by mass sitting of tests that were directly related to job descriptions. This meant that the procedure provided some guarantees concerning equal opportunities as regards job access for population groups that have long been accustomed to being utterly excluded from such access;
- a broad concertation framework was set up, bringing together enterprises, State authorities, local groups and elected representatives, as well as residents' associations of varying degrees of formality, under the auspices of the Mission Emploi du Grand Projet Urbain. This concertation framework very subtly enabled residents of the neighbouring districts to exercise some control over the various stages of the process, to check that they complied with undertakings and, where applicable, to negotiate changes in unsatisfactory practices. The full significance of this procedure lay in the fact that it offered a framework within which to balance the expectations of local residents and the customary recruitment practices of the many construction enterprises working on the site. Even now, it still provides a sort of "follow-up right", a way of monitoring respect of undertakings over time. The one-stop-shop recruitment system managed by the Agence Locale pour l'Emploi continues to function for any further recruitment to replace staff who have left, for any short-term or temporary contracts on offer, etc.

- **A sense of balance in settling disputes between local groups**

The priority area targeted by this effort to equalise opportunities is not an homogeneous whole. As we have seen, Marseilles' Quartiers-Nord comprise a number of different estates, districts and village centres. There was (and still is), therefore, a real risk of provoking bitter competition between the various communities to secure the largest possible share of the jobs available.

As matters stand at the moment, it would seem that the use of this recruitment procedure has managed to stave off any problems of this kind, and this because of steps taken at two specific stages:

- before any decision to recruit, steps were taken to set up a single and relatively transparent framework for managing job offers and applications, whose regularity was guaranteed by State services. This single framework made it possible to channel the energies of the various residents' groups that were demanding job access into a broader and more unifying collective dynamic. By maintaining an agreed right to inspect future recruitment, it has promoted a sense of collective ownership of the shopping centre by the residents of the neighbouring housing estates, including those who have not (as yet, they may believe) drawn any benefit from the project;
- when taking recruitment decisions, the private main employers, having sole responsibility for such decisions, seem to have made sure that jobs went to people throughout the area, applying an order of priority based on concentric circles, so that the closer an estate is to the shopping centre, the greater priority its residents were given. Some of our interviewees justified this as a form of compensation for the disruption caused by the various phases of construction.

A sort of fragile equilibrium seems to have been achieved among the various small local communities, which has helped to prevent rivalry and confrontation. However, the fragility of this equilibrium is clearly visible, for example, in the words of one member of a committee of unemployed people, who told us: *“I believe the people who have benefited the most from this whole thing are those who live close to Continent, because the supermarket’s management is afraid they will invade and occupy their store. The other districts of the Quartiers-Nord have been somewhat disregarded”*.

4.2 The limitations of the Grand Littoral project

The positive aspects we have described must, however, be weighed against the quantitative and qualitative limitations of the jobs created by the project.

- **Many called and few chosen: a general sense of betrayal**

The process that led to 8000 job applications and just 842 stable jobs has left its mark. The great majority of local people, some of whom had been counting for several years on getting a job at the Grand Littoral Shopping Centre, have been left empty-handed. Particularly for those whose ability to use written French was the poorest, who were nonetheless not eligible as part of the *“most disadvantaged”* quota, the written tests marked the end of the line.

Others, particularly (though not only) the young men taken on as labourers on the building site, had short-term contracts for just a few months and were then back at square one, that is, on the unemployment register. These people are beginning to feel they have simply been thrown a few crumbs, in exchange for the social harmony that was so vital to the success of the project. This feeling is accompanied by a sense that the recruitment procedure was of less benefit to young male Maghrebis than it was to other residents of the Quartiers-Nord, and this for two reasons: firstly, in the part of the recruitment procedure that comprised written tests, men’s results were very much poorer than women’s⁴²; and secondly, the renewal of some temporary contracts of employment, or their conversion into permanent contracts, is seen (rightly or wrongly) as often being based on “ethnic” criteria. One of the social workers who was heavily involved in the project told us: *“When young people come to me, saying, ‘Oh yes, they’re in the process of getting rid of all the Maghrebis and keeping all the white-heads (têtes blanches)’, I know there is some truth in what they’re saying”*. There is therefore a need to supervise and monitor the process as it continues.

Unemployed people’s sense of disappointment is also shared by staff of the public employment service who are in daily contact with them. After making a huge effort throughout the project, they find themselves faced with a situation that has barely changed. The contrast between the efforts made and a result that seems, in many ways, to be nothing more than *“a drop (of employment) in the ocean (of unemployment)”* is certainly unlikely to make them feel optimistic.

⁴² According to one member of Continent’s management team who took part in the entire recruitment procedure, *“the women and young women of these districts have a better educational level than the young men”*.

Furthermore, staffing levels at these public employment offices have been raised, with several people being taken on under short-term contracts especially because of the Grand Littoral project. Some of these contracts are now reaching their end and the future of the individuals concerned and of the functions they have been performing seems uncertain. Nevertheless, the intermediary role played by these “extra troops”, themselves residents of the Quartiers-Nord, seems to have been a determining factor. It is they who have largely been responsible for channelling the aggressive energies of the gangs of young men from local estates into an institutionalised framework for the settlement of disputes.

Uncertainty about their future is a further cause of demoralisation and raises the issue of recognition of the quality of the work performed by these non-statutory employees - a quality that nobody disputes.

- **So, now you’ve got a job: yes, but...**

A very high proportion of the jobs given to local people are part-time and an even higher proportion require very low skill levels.

The fact that jobs are part-time is directly reflected in very low pay levels, since the hourly rate of pay is close to the minimum wage (SMIC - see Glossary). For example, a cashier working a basic 30 hours a week at Continent earns approximately FF 3800 net a month. If this is the only wage coming into the household, this means that life is tough. And yet a cashier earning this much is “lucky”, since the contracts of most of his or her colleagues provide for only a basic 25 hours a week. Having secured a part-time job does not therefore automatically lead to any significant improvement in a person’s purchasing power, especially since the working times imposed by the employer and the shortage of public transport providing links with the workplace make it difficult for people to top up their pay by taking another part-time job or casual work.

The low skill levels involved in the jobs offered to local people is even more striking. All the supervisory and management positions at the hypermarket have been filled by internal transfers within the Continent Group or by recruitment “outside the area”; nor have any skilled manual jobs (butchery and bakery sections, etc.) been given to Quartiers-Nord residents. However, the fact that a high proportion of the labour force in the 15th and 16th *arrondissements* are unqualified workers does not mean there are no skilled and qualified jobseekers among them. Several of our interviewees who were involved in managing the recruitment procedure expressed their surprise at the “*high quality*” of applicants, which was something they had not expected. For example, one of the examiners of the tests for cashiers commented that the results achieved by local residents in the standard tests for this type of job were significantly higher than the national average: “*a very large number of the people sitting the cashier tests passed: 541 out of 1019. That is a little higher than 50%, when the national pass rate for these tests in our other stores is 35-40%*”.

The chances of internal promotion seem - even at Continent, which is the largest enterprise at the shopping centre - to be very limited and, in fact, do not even seem to be on the agenda. The comments of one member of the hypermarket’s management team, who told us that, in the main “*the people we have taken on are right for the job, but they’re certainly not ripe for promotion*”, are counterbalanced by those of another, who, speaking of the cashiers, said:

“they are all ambitious and very willing. (...) They are all asking for in-house training”. And yet there do not seem to be any plans to *“enable them to gain access to other jobs in the future”* or *“to take account of employees’ wishes”* in this area. If we put the call for in-house vocational training together with this statement by an active member of a committee of unemployed people: *“some of our young people have educational qualifications, but the only jobs they’re offered are in the warehouse or unloading lorries. They’ve worked hard at school to avoid ending up like their parents, and yet find themselves in an even worse situation”*, we can see that there could be a further widening of the gap between the job expectations of Quartiers-Nord residents and the limitations of the jobs they are actually being offered.

4.3 Various actors, various viewpoints: similar yet differing evaluations

Now that we have looked at the limitations concerning the results of the Grand Littoral project, we can move on to analyse the (generally positive) evaluations by the main partners involved and identify their respective approaches, motivation and evaluation criteria.

- **The main promoters of the Grand Littoral project: Tréma and Continent**

As legal persons, the interests of Tréma and Continent are closely connected: the success of the shopping centre depends on that of the hypermarket and the success of the hypermarket depends on the shopping centre being well integrated in its environment. From this point of view, two inseparable criteria determine these two groups’ evaluation of the project; social harmony, which determines consumers’ willingness to use the shopping centre, and the quality of local recruits, on which the smooth running of the hypermarket depends.

This was expressed by one of Continent’s managers, when he told us that *“it was not a question of integration for integration’s sake”*, but rather a question of *“developing the site and taking precautions against potential risks”* and *“turning possible tensions to the advantage of the enterprise”*, i.e. encouraging staff to develop a sense of loyalty to the enterprise, which promotes a sense of duty and motivation in their work.

This twofold objective has largely been achieved:

- relations with the local environment are, so far, satisfactory and, despite the general sense of betrayal that we mentioned earlier, the Grand Littoral Shopping Centre has been accepted, even adopted as their own, by local people. Contrary to the rumours about chronic crime in the area, the centre seems to suffer less than its counterparts in other areas. One of the hypermarket’s security officers even made a point of mentioning the quality of the methods used to deal with problems, particularly when challenging and taking action against loutish behaviour. He puts this down to the composition of the security teams he supervises, most of whose members have been recruited from among young people living on the neighbouring estates. This method of dealing with problems seems to be based on the notion of respect: respect of their undertaking of loyalty towards their employer on the part of security guards who are Quartiers-Nord residents; and respect of these security guards by other young people from the same districts, while and because they are at work. In cases where this balance breaks down, a good knowledge of local social networks makes it possible to appeal to the sense of honour of the family or group concerned by contacting the appropriate person (father, uncle, etc.).

Such loyalty to the employer obviously needs to be reciprocated by equal respect. Certain issues, such as the criteria for renewing or refusing to renew temporary contracts of employment in subcontracting enterprises, the reasons for any dismissals and the methods of recruiting new staff, are seen by these agents as good indicators of the respect that is shown for them;

- although with some slight differences of opinion, all the members of the hypermarket's management we interviewed said they were pleased with the results of the recruitment process. One of them, in particular, spoke of "*a real desire to become a part of the company and to please the employer*", "*a willingness to treat the job of cashier as a real profession*". To support his comments, he cited two indices: an absenteeism rate of less than 3%, as against a national average of 7-9%; and the hopes of internal promotion expressed by his subordinates: "*they want to move on to other jobs in the future (...): hostess, a job in the central cashier's office or an administrative post... Nowadays their main focus is the enterprise*".

The cosmopolitan range of origins does not, as a general rule, cause any problems in relations with customers and may even be appreciated as a sign of a sort of "aesthetic exoticism": "*the colour of the cashiers' faces really doesn't matter. They all wear the Continent uniform and have all followed a course in appearance and presentation. They are very friendly. Of course, it's easy to see they are of various origins, but that never seems to upset the customers*".

Management's satisfaction with locally recruited staff has undoubted links with the mass nature of the screening process that was part of the pre-recruitment selection procedure.

Tréma and Continent therefore have good reason to be satisfied that they have achieved their objectives. This evaluation would be incomplete, however, if account were not taken of the symbolic gains secured by the individuals, managerial and professional staff, who were responsible for practical management of the procedure. The ones we have met and who had participated in the entire process expressed their satisfaction and, in some cases, their enthusiasm: "*it was a fabulous experience*". Satisfaction at having had the chance to "*do something different*", like devising and implementing a training plan that required abilities and qualities differing from those usually required of them. The intellectual and cultural stimulation of discovering social environments and issues of which they were ignorant or only vaguely aware, of having taken part in finding new responses, and, in the end, the satisfaction of having played a part in a successful social project: "*On the urban and social level, the centre has created a sense of cohesiveness (...). We have brought in work and money and have tried to share them around*".

- **State services**

Representatives of public labour and employment bodies put forward two main grounds for satisfaction with the Grand Littoral project, though with the qualifier that this satisfaction may be temporary.

The first concerns the results that have been achieved, in terms of respect of the labour code and workers' protection (respect of health and safety standards on the building site; monitoring of recruitment methods and of use of casual workers and temporary contracts of employment), but also in terms of the quality of service offered to employers. This quality is deemed to be higher than the quality that would have been provided, at great cost, by a private recruitment service, partly because of the huge resources that were mobilised, but also because of specific knowledge of and an ability to draw on sources of public funding controlled by the State.

This means that evaluation of the quality of the results of public sector intervention is based on two aspects: the competence of the public service and its ability to adapt to changes in needs and requirements; and the (politically, socially and economically) integrating role of the Republican State, which, as regards employment, has reaffirmed its role as arbiter - a role that had become rather vague as a result of municipal policy and the laws on decentralisation, which have multiplied the number of decision-making centres. Thus, the use of State services to manage a controversial situation led to the negotiated introduction of some public control over a private recruitment procedure (and, therefore, of some control over the public concerned by that procedure).

The second ground for satisfaction concerns issues of recognition and organisation within the public administration responsible for employment.

Virtually all social policies are now applied via municipal policy, a framework in which the public services responsible for labour and employment are somewhat marginalised, particularly given the paucity of their resources. Co-ordinated action by the departmental employment services, the Inspection du Travail and ANPE, within the framework of one of the largest municipal policy projects in France (Marseilles' GPU), enabled these public services to reverse the trend and affirm the central place occupied by their area of competence in urban social development projects.

This being so, one of our interviewees told us that the public labour and employment service *"has, at the cost of a huge joint effort, gained recognition"*: recognition by their superior authorities which have carefully monitored every detail of this innovative experiment; recognition by local and regional political groupings, which, having tried vote-catching tactics, had to give way to extricate themselves from an impossible situation; recognition by enterprises that have benefited from the service provided; recognition by local people, and particularly young people, for whom *"the public labour and employment services are, to a certain extent, a guarantee of honesty and goodwill"*. Even the place where meetings of the various members of the Comité Emploi-GPU took place is invested with this symbolic quality: *"The Préfecture was a place where the Republican ideal was legitimate. This was very significant as regards integration and the evocation of a sense of citizenship. It was a validating point of reference. And it was better that it was the Préfecture, the State, that was the valid point of reference, rather than a few groups or over-enthusiastic individuals..."*.

- **FACE**

FACE took a firm stance as a body devoted to the integration of people who have serious difficulty in gaining access to employment. Using its national agreement with the Promodès Group as a basis, it conducted its own operations within the recruitment procedure and is satisfied with the results it achieved: having completed a training course, 58 people were employed by Continent under permanent contracts and, as a whole, they are now well integrated as members of Continent's staff. Thus, FACE has been able to demonstrate its abilities and says that it is now in a position to transfer its knowledge and know-how to other areas. The Vaulx-en-Velin site was particularly mentioned.

This independent, deliberate, "guerrilla-type" approach has given rise to some reservations: on the one hand, the cooperation that was needed with other systems involved with and holding files on "more disadvantaged" members of the population (PLIE, Mission RMI, ANPE, etc.) seems often to have had the flavour of competition rather than partnership, especially given FACE's priority of seeking "media coups", on the basis of an approach that is not very compatible with the constraints of a long-term project; and on the other, the "separate" treatment of recruitment through FACE has been reflected in some differences between the employment contracts negotiated. For example, "FACE cashiers" have a contract for 30 hours a week, whilst "ANPE cashiers" have contracts for 25 hours. The results of this is an on-going distinction that is giving rise to some rancour and tension and, more generally, a restriction of potential forms of solidarity among colleagues (it is, for example, virtually impossible for them to swap working hours because their working week is structured differently). There is a real risk of a negative effect here - a risk of the permanent labelling of those who might be perceived as "welfare cases" and of the enforcement of a more widespread sense of "difference", albeit unconscious and unacknowledged, that is quite marked in managers' comments, despite their claims to the contrary.

- **Quartiers-Nord workers**

Continent's management assumed that "*anyone recruited would be grateful to the enterprise and be dedicated and motivated in their work*". To put it more bluntly, management assumed that the intensity of competition and selection for jobs would be reflected in greater staff loyalty, i.e. that they would see the relationship linking them to the employer not simply as a contractual relationship but as a relationship based on "*gratitude*", "*a sense of indebtedness*" and "*devotion*". Some of the "lucky people" selected are happy to have a job and demonstrate the kind of loyalty one might expect to the enterprise that has given them a job. But this is not to say that they have abandoned either their critical powers (see Section 4.2 on the project's limitations) or their desire to improve their job situation, even if it entails changing employer.

Despite the high employment rate in the area, the climate within the hypermarket seems to be very different from the climate that is generally recognised as being typical of the retail trade, which is, according to one of the Labour Inspectors we spoke to, seen "*as a very repressive environment in which liberties are frequently infringed*" and where labour relations tend to be governed by "*pressure and fear*". Several of our interviewees - despite occupying very different positions - made a point of mentioning the "peaceful" nature of labour relations, including hierarchical relationships, at Continent. Freedom of speech and language, the good relations and solidarity between employees, and descriptions of the peaceful settlement of

tensions with some members of the supervisory staff lead us to believe that the atmosphere is relatively relaxed.

It would appear that this atmosphere, which seems to be relatively uncommon in the retail sector, can be attributed to two main factors that are inextricably intertwined: Continent's methods of recruiting and managing staff, and the specific relationship between the shopping centre and its environment.

The members of Continent's professional and managerial staff who were responsible for the recruitment procedure started out with more questions than fixed ideas about how to proceed. Their awareness of the "*Quartiers-Nord issue*", which was perceived as an essential factor in the formulation of an initial strategy, undoubtedly encouraged an approach to new recruits that looked beyond their purely occupational function and integrated a broader social dimension.

The type of training offered to employees, most of whom were new to the sector, and even to employment, probably helped them not to be totally boxed into their occupational role: "*They told us about all sorts of things, even things that did not concern us directly. I had the feeling they were really interested in us*" (Cashier).

The long selection and training procedure followed by all the locally recruited staff, many of whom were young, made it possible to create a sense of solidarity: "*We were all a bit scared when the store first opened. But we supported each other, and still do now*" (Cashier).

Finally, the very widespread awareness of the interdependence between the shopping centre and its environment helps to ensure that everyone understands that worker-employer relations need to be based on mutual respect and clearly defined ground rules. This approach therefore provides a basis that is certainly not favourable to the hierarchical high-handedness that is the vital ingredient of an atmosphere dominated by fear.

An appropriate strategy of managing human resources and a relationship with local actors have thus combined to create a working environment that everyone has described to us in a positive light, notwithstanding the odd reservation. One member of Continent's professional and managerial team even went as far as to describe the store as a sort of social centre that has been appropriated by the young people of the Quartiers-Nord working there, who visit the staff room even outside working hours and organise staff outings at weekends.

4.4 A very obvious absence: race and ethnic background

The option chosen for the Grand Littoral project, which gives priority to a geographical conception of positive discrimination, has meant that ethnic issues have been somewhat disregarded in local social relations (see Section 2.1 above). It is not that ethnic issues are absent, far from it, but that, when people are speaking about the project, the issue tends to be implied or referred to by euphemisms, or even to cause a certain embarrassment.

The entire recruitment procedure was designed to promote equal opportunities as regards job access for the residents of the Quartiers-Nord, who were seen as an homogeneous whole, as a geographical minority. Of course, in the background, there is an image of these districts as a "cosmopolitan" area with, in particular, a high proportion of North Africans among the

population. This dimension of positive discrimination has not, however, come to the forefront. For their part, Continent's managers all claim not to have taken any account, either negative or positive, of applicants' origin during the recruitment procedure: "*there was no intention that the recruitment procedure should favour people of a particular ethnic origin*". But denial of the ethnic dimension does not mean that it disappears out of sight and out of mind. And, in fact, most of the interviews we held followed a similar pattern.

To start with, ethnic groups were "disregarded" in favour of a socio-geographical category (residence in the Quartiers-Nord). This often happened even when the interviewee concerned was likely to be "ethnically aware" on a personal level - i.e. was obviously a member of an ethnic group and possibly proud of the fact.

This sidelining of the ethnic issue might be seen as a morally acceptable way of dealing with a sensitive subject: adherence to the Republican principle of equality (which is, in particular, obligatory in any discourse by institutional actors); affirmation of a prevailing sense of unity based on class, residential community or working group, etc. It also has to do with the malleability of the socio-geographical category involved, which can easily be invested with very personal images. Everyone sees Quartiers-Nord residents in their own way and, possibly, in their own image. This is why the assessments of the number or proportion of "Quartiers-Nord residents" employed at the Grand Littoral Shopping Centre offered by the "Quartiers-Nord residents" (whether or not employed at the centre) we met varied, depending on their situation: their gender, the estate they live on, their age, etc.

Then, the ethnic issue, which had so carefully been set aside, crept back in, little by little. By the end of the interview, ethnic groups would be making a reappearance, albeit defined by a broad range of different criteria: geographical, cultural or national origin; religious beliefs; language, etc. So that, by the end of our research, we had heard people talking about "North Africans" ("*beurs*"), "Maghrebis", "Arabs", "Africans", "Mediterraneans", "Asians", "Algerians", "Comoro Islanders", "Italians", "Portuguese", "Chinese", "Moslems", "Jews", "blacks" ("*noirs*"), "coloureds" ("*basanés*"), "darkies" ("*bronzés*"), "immigrants", "French by blood" ("*Français de souche*"), "white-whites" ("*blancs-blancs*"), "white-heads" ("*têtes blanches*"), "Europeans" and "Bretons". Of course, interviewees would define and use these categories in different ways, depending on the point they were arguing or in response to a more specific question, as in the case of the FACE officer we mentioned earlier, who claimed that our question was completely irrelevant and then went on to specify how many of his staff came from the Maghreb and the Comoro Islands (see Section 3.4 above).

- **Ethnic background and negative discrimination in the recruitment procedure**

It was often in connection with the subject of (negative) discrimination in the recruitment procedure that ethnic criteria returned to the surface.

Staff of the public employment service, for example, when speaking of the building site or the shopping centre, mentioned certain job offers that were expressly closed to “non-European” applicants, as well as a larger number of other job offers that were implicitly discriminatory because they comprised conditions that had nothing to do with the job concerned, such as, for example, the requirement for “*fluent French*” for a cleaner.

A member of the CGT’s committee of unemployed people, speaking of discrimination arising from the stigma attached to the Quartiers-Nord, even described the principles of an “ethnic” division of labour:

- *“The fact is that no-one is going to employ somebody from the Quartiers-Nord to sell, say, expensive perfume. We mustn’t delude ourselves - there are jobs that are set aside for us, and others that aren’t. We’re not idiots...”*.
- Question: Simply on the basis of a geographical criterion?
- *“Yes. And then there are some people who just can’t bring themselves to give a job to someone, simply because they’re black, because they’re Arab, because it bothers customers. We’re hidden away behind the scenes, loading and unloading”*.
- Question: And they actually tell you that?
- *“Oh no, they wouldn’t dare. But it’s obvious”*.

These categories can be pregnant with meaning and powerfully evident. This emerges, for example, from the comments of some of the staff of the public employment service to whom we spoke, who set great store by the Republican principle. Right at the beginning of the interview, they explain that: *“As soon as you see the names on the list of people who have been given jobs, you will realise that many of them are of immigrant origin. But most of them have been brought up in France and, of course, a name doesn’t mean much. Most of them are French, and that’s the end of it”*. And yet, during the interview, they talk about the problem of job offers containing restrictions based on ethnic group and end up drawing a distinction between ones that are “racist” and ones that are not, or not really: *“You’ll get the odd idiot who’ll say, ‘Well, it’s simple, I hate blacks’; and then you will have “an enterprise that is set up in this kind of district, which has a high percentage of Maghrebis among its staff and wants to achieve a better mix... Or there may be ethnic groups that simply cannot get on together. And you have to take account of that. (...) But I wouldn’t call that racist... A job offer is racist when the fact that a person is a member of a particular ethnic group can have absolutely no impact on the success of the enterprise and when it’s simply a question of an individual who cannot bear to have anything to do with people of other races”*. And thus the sheer evidence of ethnic or “racial” categories ends up hiding the peculiarities of racist thinking whereby it boxes “the other” into preconceived categories that are based on a mixture of physical, acquired cultural, psychological and social traits.

- **Inter-ethnic relations and labour relations at Continent**

Overall, employees do not feel that the recruitment procedure set up by Continent is marred by discrimination: *“if they were racists, I wouldn’t be working there”*, commented one of our interviewees. However, we noted that the game of hide-and-seek we had identified elsewhere as regards the ethnic issue was also evident in labour relations, and was actually at the very root of the strategy initially drawn up.

On the one hand, management *“really encouraged its professional and managerial staff to take up the challenge of integrating the people of the Quartiers-Nord, with all their different origins, backgrounds and cultures”*. Managers were *“made aware of the problems of the Quartiers-Nord”*, from *“the hidden economy to unemployment to ethnic issues, since there are members of 33 different ethnic groups living in the Quartiers-Nord (...). So, managers learned all about, in inverted commas, the specific features of the various ethnic groups”*. In particular, this enabled them *“to understand how the family unit works, who has power over whom, etc.”* - details that were considered useful to enable managers to deal with any unexpected situations as regards staff management.

On the other hand, everyone claims that no account (in any sense) was taken of ethnic origin during the recruitment procedure, or when new recruits were being assigned to the various sections or when work teams were being formed. We were also told that ethnic origin *“is not something that we think about all the time”*. *“Of course, you can tell by people’s faces that this person is Breton or that one comes from the South Mediterranean, but we really don’t think about it. The thought passes in a moment. (...) In the end, you just get used to it”*.

This discounting of ethnic origin is not something that is simply taken for granted and is certainly based on a choice, since it would seem that other stores owned by the Group use recruitment strategies that include ethnic criteria (for example, preference may be given to the recruitment of people from South-East Asia) as a way of curbing the CGT’s attempts to get its foot in the door.

The argument put forward by the hypermarket’s management and professional and managerial staff therefore balances a recognition of some of the unique features of some of the staff and a wish to conceal those features. This balancing act is part and parcel of a triangular relationship between the enterprise (personified by its professional and managerial staff), locally recruited employees (who represent the local environment within the enterprise) and customers (of whom only a minority live in the Quartiers-Nord).

Four months after the grand opening, two subjects seem most particularly to lead to use of the ethnic register, according to this principle of balancing recognition and concealment: religious practices and the open display of membership of a particular minority group.

Although the demand by some workers to be allowed a day off to celebrate the Jewish festival of Yom Kippur took management by surprise, the period of Ramadan had long been anticipated, especially since it coincides with a peak shopping period, close to Christmas and New Year. On this occasion, Continent’s management decided to take a pragmatic approach: *“We didn’t know how to deal with the situation. We didn’t know how many of our staff would be involved [How many of them were Moslems or how many were practising Moslems?] We wondered if we were going to be asked in advance to make special working time*

arrangements. In fact, this year at least, we didn't have to take any particular steps or make special working time arrangements for Ramadan. Of course, we tried to meet the few requests we received from individuals. But it had certainly been a cause for concern. We had nightmares of nobody turning up to work for a month... But, in the event, it all went well. We had no particular problems with people being absent or not working properly. On that score, you wouldn't even have realised it was Ramadan". Of course, this year, the whole issue was simplified by the fact that Ramadan took place at a time of year when the days are very short. Those who requested it were allowed to take a 10-15-minute break from work to break their fast at sunset at about five o'clock; to do this, they either took their usual afternoon break at a different time or made up the time at the beginning or end of their working hours.

This pragmatic approach can be summarised as follows:

1. A high proportion of staff are likely to want to fast at Ramadan, with the concomitant risk of disrupting the organisation of work.

The ethnic connotations attached to religion were clearly evident in our interviews with professional and managerial staff:

- *"Since 75% of our cashiers live in the Quartiers-Nord, what surprised me was that only about 15% of them are followers of this religion".*
 - Question: So, you think that a majority of the people living in the Quartiers-Nord are likely to be Moslems?
 - *"Yes, yes, I'd say the majority. Oh, yes. So, I was surprised, because I thought many more of the young people would follow their parent's religion";*
2. The very siting of the store means there is a need to adapt and take account of these specific features of ethnic communities: *"I'd say that, because the store is in the Quartiers-Nord, it's up to us to adapt to our staff's needs in connection with their religion";*
 3. This adaptation needs to focus on the individual rather than the group, so as not to give rise to demands based on identity, and it must also be discreet: *"I knew it was Ramadan in January, but I waited to see who would want to celebrate it. Because, if I'd done the opposite and put up notices or asked them about it, I know just what would have happened - lots of people would have developed religious beliefs to make sure they benefited from any special arrangements".*

According to the interviews we held with members of staff, however, it would seem that more people fasted for Ramadan than management thought, because the shortness of the day made it possible for some of them to keep the fact quiet.

Surprisingly, the establishment of trade-union workplace branches is another example of the role played by the ethnic issue, from the point of view of religious implications in labour relations. The first trade-union organisation to have declared a delegate at the hypermarket was the Confédération Française des Travailleurs Chrétiens [CFTC - French Christian Workers'

Confederation]. According to a member of the professional and managerial staff⁴³, “*some workers could not understand what the CFTC - the French Christian Workers’ Confederation - was doing in a store where most of the workers were Moslem. (...) It was seen as a bit of a provocation, in inverted commas. Some people said, ‘Well, look here, we’ll just set up a French Moslem Workers’ Confederation’ ”.*

Opinions on the establishment of trade-union workplace branches are usually based on political analysis. In this case, however, they also reflect a view of the staff and their way of life and focus on religious categories. So, coming a few minutes after a comment about the small number of workers who celebrated Ramadan, mention of these religious categories leads not to an analysis of practices but to an ethnic connotation associated with workers’ origins: “*What’s going to be interesting is seeing who they’re going to identify themselves with. (...) It may be that all the Moslems (...) will identify with someone of the same origin, who may be in another trade union whose (religious) inclinations are less marked*”.

The other main area in which the ethnic register is used concerns the question of signs of membership of a minority group and their concealment from customers. Of course, there is no question of making physical traits disappear, rather it is a question of “managing” them. Thus, when a security guard mentioned customers’ initial surprise, when the centre first opened, “*that there were so many darkies (bronzés) working there*”, he was making the point to stress the transience of this reaction. Of course, the main point of contact between customers and workers is at the check-out, and we have already seen that this whole environment was imbued with a certain “exotic chic”. Here, again, we find the same principle of balancing the recognition and concealment of ethnicity. The rows of check-outs have been used to create an environment that has a certain charm in being both ethnic and dangerous. But it has also been important to conceal any sign of ethnic individuality, so that the sense of “otherness” has nothing more than an exotic nuance. The fact that cashiers are required to wear full uniform - and not simply, say, a blouse of a certain colour - is one of the ways used to achieve this objective, by suppressing any individuality of dress, but it does not deal with the whole issue. Regulations about the cashiers’ use of henna is a particularly illuminating example.

Tradition (which, contrary to management’s understanding, has nothing to do with Islam) requires that women of certain cultural groups decorate their hands using a henna-based dye that does not wash off for a relatively long time. Without going into all the details, it is a sort of good-luck charm for the bride and a statement by the other women present at the wedding, signifying that they share the good wishes for the young couple’s future happiness and success. This custom, which is particularly common among people from the Maghreb, came to the fore when a young Moroccan cashier got married. It is a perfect illustration of the subtle balance management is seeking between the acknowledgement and concealment of ethnic individuality.

The future bride wanted to have a weekend of feasting and celebration with her family, and another with her future husband’s family, without having to work in between. But the collective agreement at Continent allows for only six days’ leave in the event of marriage. This meant she would have had to split her leave into two blocks of three days and go into work between the two - with her hands dyed with henna. So, her supervisor’s decision had to take account of two constraints: on the one hand, there was the question of anticipating customers’ possible reactions to the obvious demonstration of cultural individuality: “*I couldn’t put her on*

⁴³ Our underlining.

a check-out with henna on her hands because, given the tasks a cashier performs - handling products, taking customers' money and giving them change - I felt that customers might object to a cashier having henna on her hands". On the other hand, account had to be taken of the specific nature of the district and the local environment: *"Practising Moslems have real difficulty in understanding that they cannot follow their religion in full"*.

The decision taken by the manager responsible took account of these two contradictory factors: as an individual, the future bride was allowed to take the leave she wanted and had to make up the hours in accordance with a system agreed with the manager; collectively, cashiers were told: *"well, you can use just a little henna, but don't cover your whole hand with it - make sure it is discreet"*. This request was based on an assumption, shared (or deemed to be shared) by management and cashiers, about the risk of customers reacting negatively and how that should be dealt with: *"they say to themselves, 'OK, so far so good, customers have not voiced any objections, and that's how we want it to stay"*. The game of acknowledging-concealing ethnicity requires a minimum level of consensus among the various actors as regards the implicit rules of the game. And, to a certain extent, use of the socio-geographical category of residence in the Quartiers-Nord provides a ground on which this consensus can be constantly updated and adapted.

- **The Quartiers-Nord dialectic**

One of the actors involved in the Grand Littoral project, the Mission Emploi-GPU social mediator, expressed particularly clearly the consensual function of the "Quartiers-Nord" category. A long-standing resident of the Quartiers-Nord who has done his stint as an activist on committees of unemployed people, he was given the task of mediating between local young people (who trust him), enterprises (who frequently needed his help in an "emergency") and institutions (who provided [inadequate] funding for his post and granted him official recognition). His success in accomplishing this particularly delicate task seems to be unanimously recognised: the economic decision-makers are full of admiration for him; public institutions sing his praise loud and clear; young members of local committees described him to us as *"their man"*, responsible, within the institutional framework, for "monitoring" the respect of undertakings. He is a man who inspires trust and who, in some ways, is a symbolic incarnation of the Quartiers-Nord.

During our interview with him, he very quickly brought the ethnic register into the conversation by pointing out that his Maghrebi roots had made it easier for him to establish a relationship of trust with local young people but that, on the other hand, he had had enormous difficulty in dealing with the racist attitudes of some of the builders on the site: *"some of them wanted only workers with European-sounding names, some refused to take on Maghrebis, and so on and so forth..."*. It was easy to believe him when he said he had had to *"really grit his teeth"* so as not to over-react to such racist comments and be able to fulfil his mission of *"maintaining social harmony"* and *"promoting dialogue"*.

In particular, this task of maintaining social harmony implied dealing with disputes that arose in connection with the issue of ethnic discrimination in the recruitment procedure, which was raised by young people from the districts close to the Grand Littoral Shopping Centre: the general feeling that young Maghrebis were being channelled into less stable jobs (fixed-term contracts) and *"are now being turned back out onto the streets"*; and the belief that this

discrimination was based on sexual motives -”one man even said to me: ‘they want to steal our wives’“.

Use of the “Quartiers-Nord” category has made it possible to channel this fighting spirit and make use of it within an institutional framework, that of the GPU’s Mission-Emploi, where consensual political conciliation is sought. This is illustrated by the following anecdote. On the new building site for the construction of the Grand Littoral cinema complex, one builder directly recruited young people from the Quartiers-Nord without going through the one-stop-shop for the management of job offers run by the Agence Locale pour l’Emploi. The site was immediately occupied by a group of young people from nearby estates. Called to the rescue, the mediator noted that “*what’s more, the two lads [who had been taken on illicitly] were Europeans. I’m pleased to say that they were at least local, but three quarters of the people who came to block the site were Maghrebis. The young men were eager for a fight. But I told them ‘No. Don’t you start being racist, too, or else, afterwards, everyone will start saying that it’s the foreigners who are the real racists. I said no. They’re two local lads, OK? But he [the boss] was wrong not to go through the Mission-Emploi’*”. There are people of all origins on the Mission-Emploi files and, at the end of the day, it is the employer who decides who he is going to take on. But he still has to go through the correct procedures.

We can therefore see how use of the sole criterion of legitimate positive discrimination (“*they’re two local lads*”) makes it possible to redirect some fighting spirit with a powerful ethnic element within an institutionalised system of dispute settlement. In this respect, the “Quartiers-Nord” category could be seen as a mediation category that makes it possible to turn the conflictual into the consensual, the ethnic into the social.

CONCLUSION

FROM LOCAL PREFERENCE TO LOCALISED POSITIVE DISCRIMINATION

The unacceptability of any reference to ethnic - and, of course, racial - minorities, either as a category for the management of the public arena or in labour relations, meant that, in our research, we had to make a detour through some other social categories (“*more disadvantaged groups*”, “*people with the least chance of gaining access to employment*”, etc.) and geographical categories (residence in “sensitive areas”, “crisis areas”, etc.). The Grand Littoral project in Marseilles is not particularly unique in this respect. Before selecting this project as our case study, we looked at various other projects in which the same kind of detour would have been required, since they also concerned enterprises involved in policies to “combat social exclusion”. Overall, we can identify these other cases, which we have been unable to study in detail but most of which are based on a geographically-based approach, as being of a specific type.

Although all the enterprises concerned were seeking harmonious integration with their local environment, i.e. although their primary aim was to guarantee the social harmony required for their peaceful establishment and operation, we may also find two other types of motivation, which may go hand-in-hand: a wish to facilitate the integration of their activities in an urban context of which massive unemployment is often a feature; and a wish to improve their public image, particularly vis-à-vis public partners (State or regional authorities), who are calling for their participation in social policies. In some cases, these enterprises are also seeking to alter the structure of the age pyramid by employing younger workers.

Some enterprises target the immediate environment of their establishments. This is true, for example, of Redoute in Roubaix, which is in various ways contributing to the social policies (training, culture, leisure activities, illiteracy campaigns, etc.) being pursued in the working class district in which its headquarters has always been based.

In some cases, geographical targeting is broader or more flexible. This is true of some major public enterprises, which have a central service responsible for co-ordinating integration activities, such as a “Mission solidarité-emploi” [Job-solidarity project] or “Formation et développement social” [Training and social development], which may support initiatives of varying scope and applicable to areas of varying size (from a single district to an entire *Département*).

For example, Électricité de France [EDF - the national electricity company], which was having increasing difficulty in reading meters on some “rough” estates in Lyons, employed⁴⁴ young people from these “sensitive” districts as meter-readers and then offered them alternance training by finding them placements in enterprises (SMEs - small and medium-sized enterprises).

⁴⁴ Under fixed-term contracts. Alternance training is a public-sector method of vocational training and receives State funding. It can be offered both to students and to people covered by a contract of employment. In this case, the young trainees are employed and receive a wage.

On the huge site of one of its technical units, Gaz de France (the national gas company) has introduced an alternance training programme, in co-operation with the building enterprises involved. This makes provision for each participant to receive individual attention and is aimed mainly at local young people.

Similarly, the Renault factory in Flins has an in-house training programme aimed mainly at young people from “problem estates” in its employment catchment area, which covers several relatively distant communes.

The quest for peaceful relations with the local environment and use of the geographical criterion are not therefore exclusive to Marseilles. On the other hand, the Grand Littoral project does have at least two significant unique features, which are the sheer volume of jobs created and the complexity of the interactions involved. The number of jobs that can be made available to local people (several hundred in one go) sets the stakes for population groups that are suffering particularly badly from unemployment. There is no need to reiterate this point; we simply need to remember that this is an exceptional situation. This does not mean, however, that the complexity of the inter-relationships that fed this dynamic is any less remarkable.

The case we have described here is the product of a complicated dynamic between local actors whose interests are by nature varied and even partially contradictory and who, in particular, have powers and responsibilities that differ greatly in terms of both their nature and their extent. During these numerous interactions, a “common ground”, in both the real and metaphorical sense, was nevertheless identified (see Section 2.4). The system of “local preference”, which was initially perceived as the enterprise’s contribution to “combating exclusion”, covered only a tenth of the jobs concerned. As events unfolded - and, particularly, as a result of pressure from local residents, relayed and channelled through public institutions - the whole approach had to change. The shopping centre, which had already become an “urban development project”, was transformed into a “scheme to promote the social integration of an urban area”. “Help” for “highly disadvantaged” people became a process of action by a whole range of partners, in particular bringing together enterprises and the public authorities responsible for municipal policy.

This very specific dynamic also raises the question of the limited transferability of the Grand Littoral project, which would never have taken the shape it did without the conjunction of at least three determining factors: the particularly vigorous and varied actions taken by local residents and their representatives and representative organisations; the highly deliberate intervention of State services; and the fact that the project’s main promoters had become a “captive audience”, since the project was too far advanced to be abandoned, which meant they were forced to negotiate and compromise.

Nor is it possible to see this project as being truly “exemplary” as regards “preventing racial discrimination and xenophobia and promoting equal treatment in the workplace”. Indeed, we have persistently pointed to the concealment of the ethnic dimension of social relations that is a feature of virtually all the interviews we conducted - a concealment that is taken to such extremes that, in the case of the enterprise concerned, the ethnic implications of religious practices and certain specific social customs seem to be the only acceptable way of mentioning ethnicity.

Does this mean, therefore, that this case study has nothing to offer in terms of drawing up a guide to good practice? Certainly not. Quite to the contrary, it would seem that, albeit unwittingly, the process that we have analysed here is part of a more general trend in attitudes towards the issue of equality in France, whereby equal rights are being placed in a relative position by the promotion of equal opportunities.

In this respect, it is highly significant that, just when staff of Marseilles' public employment services were describing and commenting on their involvement in a geographically-based positive discrimination policy, the Supreme Administrative Court published its report, whose conclusions take the same general direction. Thus, government advisers are sketching the outlines for a rapprochement of the various European approaches to the issue.

Nonetheless, if we need to identify some practical recommendations for the social partners, some of what has been learnt from the recruitment procedure followed by Continent at the Grand Littoral Shopping Centre seem to suggest some valid guidelines for pursuing the eminently "civic" objective of equal opportunities:

- job descriptions that are based on the skills required rather than on paper qualifications;
- transparency of the recruitment procedure and, in particular, selection tests that are directly linked to job descriptions;
- recognition of the role of the public services in monitoring and guaranteeing compliance with undertakings, within the framework of a clear and public definition of objectives and priorities;
- establishment of "flexible" and open structures for concerted action that offer a framework for negotiating the objectives to be achieved and, in particular, the way in which they are to be achieved; these structures should also allow for a shift "from public monitoring to a monitoring of the public" involved, as regards the regularity of the process and any adjustments that may be required.

GLOSSARY AND DEFINITIONS

ANPE: *Agence Nationale pour l'Emploi* [National Employment Agency]. National structure with local branches (ALPEs - *Agences Locales pour l'Emploi* [Local Employment Agencies]) responsible for collecting and matching job offers and applications.

CDD: *Contrat à durée déterminée* [fixed-term contract]. Temporary contract of employment.

CDI: *Contrat à durée indéterminée* [permanent contract]. Permanent contract of employment governed by labour law.

CGT: *Confédération Générale du Travail* [General Confederation of Labour]. Left-wing trade union, traditionally influenced by the Communist Party.

CONTINENT: chain of hypermarkets, mostly in France but beginning to be set up abroad.

DDTEFP: *Direction Départementale du Travail, de l'Emploi et de la Formation Professionnelle* [Departmental Directorate of Labour, Employment and Vocational Training]. Structure answerable to the Prefecture and representing the State at Departmental level.

FACE: *Fondation Agir Contre l'Exclusion* [Anti-Exclusion Foundation]. Private foundation set up by Martine Aubry, Member of Parliament and former Minister of Labour, to bring together enterprises that are seeking staff and jobseekers who “have serious difficulties” and are often not very “employable”, either because of a lack of skills or training or because they have been “out of” the world of work for a long time (or have never been “in” it).

GPU: *Grand Projet Urbain* [Major Urban Project]. A GPU is an urban development project involving local development and a revamping of the social and symbolic image of districts that are deemed to be in serious difficulty and are, therefore, “priority areas” for municipal policy. GPUs are set up by the State, in association with the local authorities.

Inspection du Travail [Labour Inspectorate]: Autonomous State body responsible for monitoring application of the Code du Travail [Labour Code].

MACIF: *Mutuelle d'Assurance des Commerçants et Industriels de France* [Mutual Insurance Company for Commercial and Industrial Enterprises in France]. Owner of the Tréma Group.

Mission Emploi-GPU or Comité Emploi-GPU [GPU Employment Office or GPU Employment Committee]: Body responsible for co-ordinating the activities of the various public employment services, which receives funding under municipal policy; also responsible for concertation between the various private and public partners.

Mission Locale pour l'Emploi [Local Employment Office]: municipal structure responsible for aiding jobseekers.

PLIE: *Plan Locale d'Insertion par l'Économique* [Local Plan for Economic Integration]. Multi-annual and multi-partner programme to help people to return to work, particularly by providing people with difficulties with individual help. In the case of Marseilles, funding comes from the European Union (50%), local authorities (municipal, regional and departmental) and the State.

PROMODES: Europe's largest food distribution group. The Continent chain is part of this Group.

RMI: *Revenu Minimum d'Insertion* [minimum work programme income]. Benefit granted to people over the age of 25 who have no resources, provided they can prove they are seeking work.

SMIC: *Salaire minimum interprofessionnel de croissance* [statutory national minimum wage]. Minimum wage.

TRÉMA: Investment and property development company. Originally, its capital and purpose were linked to a large mutual insurance company (MACIF - see above). Tréma is the promoter of the Grand Littoral Shopping Centre in Marseilles. According to the most recent information we have received, Tréma has just been sold to the American group, HINES.

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