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Choose one's Professional Future and Sandwich Training in Higher Education: Experiences and Perspectives from CFA University in Corsica

Christophe Storaï^{1*} Laetitia Rinieri²

1. Senior lecturer in Economics and Director of the Corsica-region University-sponsored Placements & Apprenticeships Service [CFA UNIV], University Institute of Technology Corsica, UMR LISA 6234, University of Corsica, BP 52, 20250 Corte, France

2. Vocational training and school-to-work transition engineer, Corsica-region University-sponsored Placements & Apprenticeships Service [CFA UNIV], Campus Grimaldi, Bât PPDB, 20250 Corte, France

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ABSTRACT

In France, the field of lifelong learning has undergone many changes since 2014 according to the laws that have been promulgated [Law No. 2014-288 of 5 March 2014 on vocational training, employment and social democracy <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000028683576&categorieLien=id> ; Law n ° 2018-771 of September 5, 2018 for the freedom to choose one's professional future <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000037367660&categorieLien=id>]. While the reform on *vocational training for employment and social democracy* finalized the decentralization of vocational training by giving regions the means for a more coherent action and placed them as a pilot for the construction of training policies, the recent law for *the freedom to choose one's professional future* recentralises the regulation of continuing vocational training and sandwich courses. This development will not fail to impact the governance of the CFA, especially those of Higher Education anchored in the small territories. Faced with this major structural issue in the specific context of a small island economy, the University Center for Apprenticeship Training in the Corsican region strives, for a decade, to contribute to the enhancement of the professional integration of work-study students from the University of Corsica, by the development and the durability of determining factors characteristic of a small territorial area in search of structuration [Specially: increased employability and quality of professional integration of its human capital, demonstrated growth in the level of skills acquisition in line with the needs expressed by local socio-economic actors, transfer of relevant knowledge through the learning process, active incentive to entrepreneurial capacity.]. After having highlighted the qualitative results resulting from the activity dynamics of the CFA University in Corsica, this contribution will analyze the perspectives drawn from the exemplary nature of the latter in the context of a new law that is supposed to contribute to the regional structuring of a knowledge and competence economy.

*Corresponding Author:

Christophe Storaï,

Senior lecturer in Economics and Director of the Corsica-region University-sponsored Placements & Apprenticeships Service [CFA UNIV], University Institute of Technology Corsica, UMR LISA 6234, University of Corsica, BP 52, 20250 Corte, France;

Email: storaï_c@univ-corse.fr

1. Introduction

The law on *the freedoms and responsibilities of universities (The French « LRU » reform of 10 August 200)* has profoundly affected the higher education landscape in France. From now on, information, guidance and vocational integration are established as essential missions of public institutions in higher education. The *LRU* reform also requires them to publish annual statistics on indicators of the occupational integration of students.

Concomitantly, since 2014, the French legislation on lifelong learning has undergone profound changes fundamentally upsetting the model of governance of vocational training in higher education institutions in general, and in universities in particular ^[1, 2]. Indeed, two laws (**See supra note 1**), with goals which are *a priori* close in terms of social democracy relating to employment and vocational training, will fundamentally impact the activity of Apprenticeship Training Centers (CFA), even though the luminal vocation of the latter remains unchanged: *promote and develop a system of theoretical, practical and technological training that enhances the professional integration of students while meeting the human resource needs expressed by employers*.

In Corsica, the promotion and development of university sandwich courses materialized through the creation of a CFA UNIV in the Corsican region whose history and specific characteristics were the subject of previous publications ^[3,4]. The issue of the quality of the professional integration of work-study students at the University of Corsica, particularly in terms of entrepreneurship awareness, revealed the strategic challenge of mastering managerial fundamentals at the heart of the development dynamic and structuring of the Corsican territory ^[5], reinforcing what other authors have shown in a more theoretical framework ^[6] or global ^[7].

The local island economy is characterized by the absence of large multinational groups that lead and shape the global economy. We do not notice the existence of medium-sized enterprises which, in many other regions, like Lombardy, are the spearhead of a dynamic economy. The Corsican economic fabric consists mainly of very small businesses, small farmers and producers, craftsmen, traders.

Corsica also presents the example of a territory characterized by an aging of its active population implying a necessary adjustment in the medium term of regional training strategies in relation to this finding. As a central focus of territorial development and a major lever of social regulation, the regional training system must adapt its offer in the targeted perspective of the adequacy of the employment-training relationship. The dual training system

and continuing vocational training constitute two sides of the same jewel in the service of a scheme for building the skills, qualifications and employability of human resources available and active in a given area.

In this major strategic perspective, the CFA UNIV's long-established and timeless vocation is to contribute to the enhancement of the professional integration of work-study students at the University of Corsica, by developing and adapting fundamental training strategies for the emergence and stimulation of the availability of qualified human resources and the entrepreneurial logic based on innovative activities with high potential growth (6, *ibid*).

After having highlighted the lessons learned from the exemplary CFA UNIV in the Corsican region in the perspective of a dynamic conception of a territorial scheme of regional development based on the economy of knowledge and competence, this paper will analyze the perspectives offered by the CFA UNIV activity in the framework of a new law supposed to liberalize the choice of the professional future of each citizen while contributing opportunely to the reinforcement of the adequacy of the pair employment-training in the heart of a small island territory.

2. The Monitoring and Evaluation of the Professional Integration of Work-study Students from the University of Corsica at the Center of the CFA UNIV Activity in Corsica

Since its transition to Extended Responsibilities and Competencies in 2009, the University of Corsica, major structure of the insular system of Higher Education and Research, has gained autonomy, in application of the law Freedoms and Responsibilities of Universities August 10, 2007.

Within this framework, the scope of its missions has been extended to include traditional tasks of training and the transmission of knowledge and skills, but also the management and reception of new students, the monitoring of their personal and professional projects until their success, that is to say the obtaining of the diploma and the occupational integration.

In this context, the CFA UNIV was designed to assume the responsibility of promoting and developing the sandwich training scheme at the University of Corsica, assuming its administrative, pedagogical and financial management. Its operation, based on the island's territorial reality, favours the mixing of people (students-classics, students-apprentices, workers).

Its prerogatives also include the production and dissemination of statistics including indicators of students' school-to-work transition.

2.1 The Conception of Follow-up Surveys to Monitor the Occupational Integration of Graduate Student Apprentices from the University of Corsica in Accordance with Ministerial Directives (The CFA UNIV conducts the annual apprenticeship-to-work transitions ('IPA') survey specific to University of Corsica sandwich-placement students (tracking transition to employment of all (graduate or non-graduate) sandwich-course leavers as of March the following year.)

In the simultaneous perspective of making a predictive judgment on the future evolutions of the training axes to be privileged in relation with the needs in human resources emanating from the Corsican socio-economic fabric and to guide the political decision-makers (the Corsican Collectivity "CdC") (In order to organize under the best conditions the exercise of the competences of the Corsican region within the framework of its specific prerogatives devolved by the law of decentralization relative to Corsica, cf. Law n° 2002-92 of January 22, 2002 relative to Corsica <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORF-TEXT000000409466&categorieLien=id>) and institutional (the University) working together to set up a higher education training map in Corsica adapted to local particularities, a specific methodology for the implementation of surveys to monitor the occupational integration of students-apprentices from the University of Corsica has been adopted. It also allows the production of widely popularized informations.

The CFA UNIV has carried out seven annual surveys on the future of graduate students-apprentices from University of Corsica (The CFA UNIV has led seven apprenticeship-to-work surveys on the transition-to-work track record of sandwich-course leavers in 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016 and 2017. The term leaver refers to where the student surveyed currently stands: he/she either (i) graduated from the last vocational training course they attended, left school and is currently in (or looking for) work, or (ii) failed to graduate or dropped out mid-year and does not envisage going back to school. The student is therefore currently in (or looking for) work.). The specific methodology for the implementation of the follow-up surveys on the occupational integration of students-apprentices (sending of questionnaires, then mailing and telephone relaunch) enabled an average response rate of 88,9% (Exact figures put the survey response rates from the sandwich-placement students concerned at 87.8% in 2011 (157 respondents out of 179 surveyed), 82.5% in 2012 (99 respondents out of 120 surveyed), 84.4% in 2013 (151 respondents out of 179 surveyed), 86.1% (136 respondents out of 158 surveyed) in 2014, 95.2% (161 respondents out of 169 surveyed) in 2015, 86.1% (158 respondents

out of 171 surveyed) in 2016 and 86.1% in 2017 (173 respondents out of 181 surveyed) (i.e. 1035 respondents out of 1164 people surveyed over the seven surveys), which is a statistically representative panel of the total population. The analyses developed are built around eight core focuses:

1. Professional status of the student
2. Job level (occupational category)
3. Contract type (long-term, short-term,...)
4. In-job salary of the student
5. Job-to-training fit (whether the job position is an extension of curriculum completed)
6. Geographic location of the job found
7. Structure taking on the sandwich-course leaver (businesses, community groups, local authorities) and its size
8. Link to the initial sandwich-placement structure (are sandwich-placement students employed under the same roof?)

The University of Corsica vocational curriculum courses surveyed illustrate five core activity areas representative of university teaching opened up to directly fill gaps in the island-wide socio-economic fabric :

(1) **Management** :DUT [university technical diploma] in *Business and Administrative Management* ('DUT GEA'), LP [national professional-vocational bachelor's degree] in *Entrepreneurship* ('LP E'), *Banking*, Masters degrees in *Business Administration*, *Human Resources*, *Regional Development Engineering*, *Sustainable Tourism Management*, *Marketing*;

(2) **Business**: DUT in *Marketing Techniques*, LPs in *Business—Marketing & Communication*, *Tourism—Hotel & Catering*, *Marketing Tourism Products*;

(3) **Computing and Communications**: DUT in *Multi-media and Internet Technology*, LP in *Communication techniques and Channels*, DU [university-issue degree diploma] in *Audiovisual Engineering*, Masters degrees in *Internet & Information Systems*, *Landscapes, Heritage & Media in Europe and the Mediterranean*, *Cultural Product Engineering*;

(4) **Industry**: DUT in *Civil Engineering*, *Biological Engineering (biotech & food-farming industries)*, DEUST [university science and technology diploma] in *Environmental Biology Analysis*, LPs in, *Civil Engineering and Construction Work*, *Electricity*, *Electronics and Industrial Systems*, *Masters degree in Mediterranean Food—Farming Systems Engineering*;

(5) **Environnemental**: DUT in *Biological Engineering (environmental engineering)*, *Health—Safety—Environment*, LP *Water and Environmental Governance*, *Health—Safety—Environment—Quality*, *Energy & Climate Engineering – renewable resource management*, Masters degrees in *Energetics & Renewable Energies*, *Water and Environmental Science*, *Integrative Management of Coastline*, *Ecosystems and Major Hazard Control*, *Ecological Engineering*.

In total, 34 applied vocational courses were targeted,

counting 903 students including 307 sandwich-placement students (Seven-year average).

2.2 Analyses Produced with Predictive Results in View of a Dynamic Conception of a Regional Development Scheme based on the Knowledge and Competence Economy

In line with the island’s Regional Vocational and Guidance Development Programme Roadmap (CPRDFOP) which set, over the period 2018-2022, objectives clearly centered on the answer to the needs of the economic fabric and the securing of the routes towards the employment via in particular a qualitative development of the sandwich course training, the CdC relies on active input from Corsica’s educative, economic and social community networks in order to optimize the coordination of vocational training programs implemented by the different actors.

The raw data and the findings reported here are taken from the seven apprenticeship-to-work surveys conducted by the CFA UNIV (See earlier under point VI).

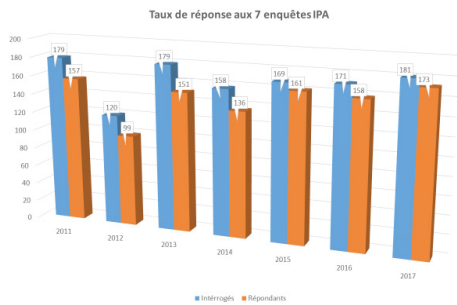


Figure 1. Response rates to the 7 apprenticeship-to-work surveys

(a) Breakdown distribution of sandwich-placement students in the 5 core activity areas representative of university teaching opened up to directly fill gaps in the island-wide socio-economic fabric (The field of education corresponds to a specific programme drawn up by the Ministry of Higher Education and Research)

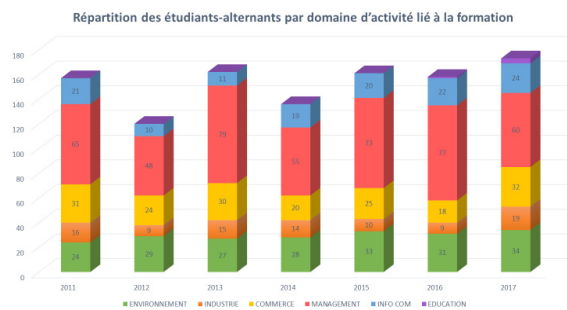


Figure 2. Distribution of sandwich-placement students broken down by vocation training discipline

(b) Distribution of sandwich-placement students broken down by diploma

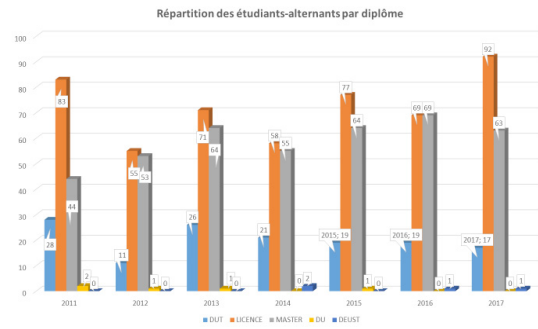


Figure 3. Distribution of sandwich-placement students broken down by diploma

(c) Career situation of sandwich-course leavers

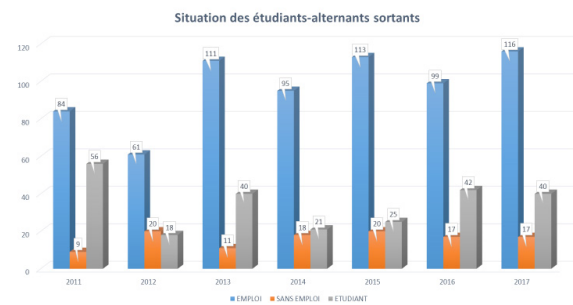


Figure 4. Career situation of sandwich-course leavers

(d) Types of job contracts held by sandwich-course leavers

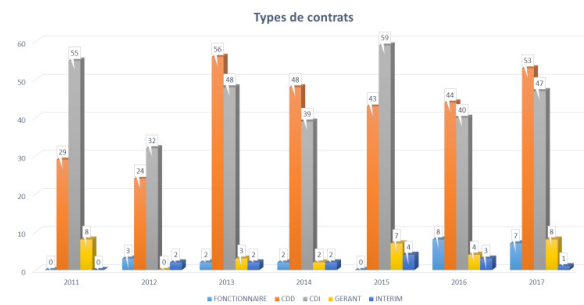


Figure 5. Types of job contracts

(e) Type of occupational categories held by sandwich-course leavers

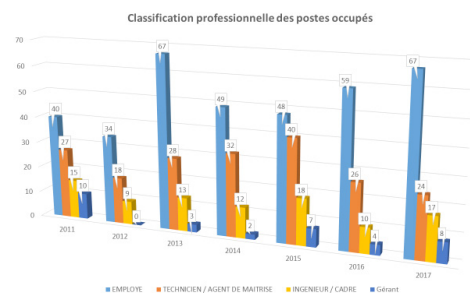


Figure 6. Professional classification of the jobs held

(f) Job-to-training fit for sandwich-course leavers

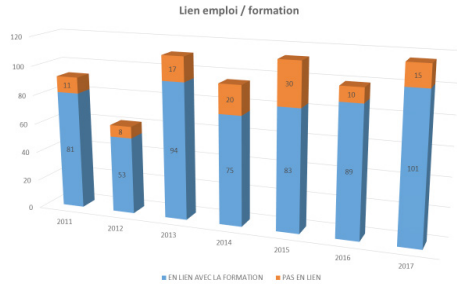


Figure 7. Job-to-training fit

(g) Type of structures taking on sandwich-course leavers (Unavailable data in 2016)

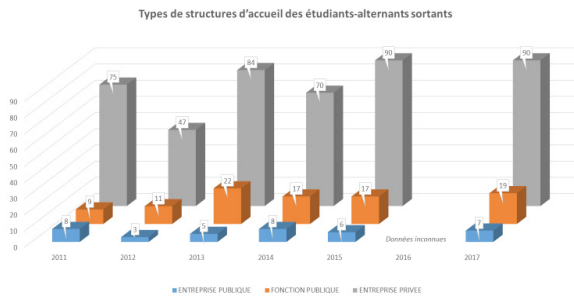


Figure 8. Type of structures taking on sandwich-course leavers

(h) Size of structures taking on sandwich-course leavers (Unavailable data in 2016)

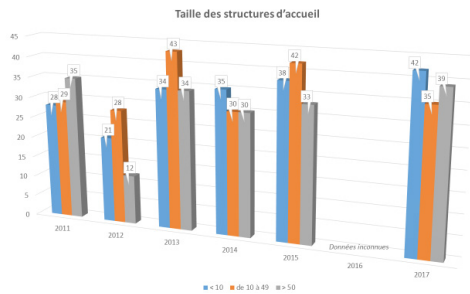


Figure 9. Size of structures taking on sandwich-course leavers

(i) Geographic location of jobs found by sandwich-course leavers

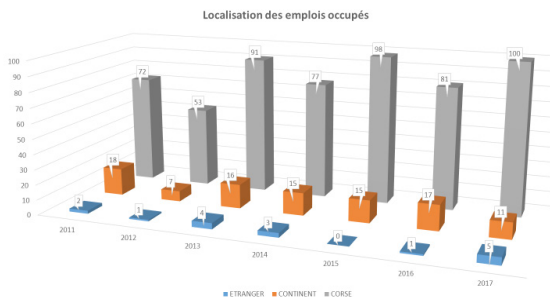


Figure 10. Location of job contracts held

(j) Wages of jobs held by sandwich-course leavers (Unavailable data in 2016)

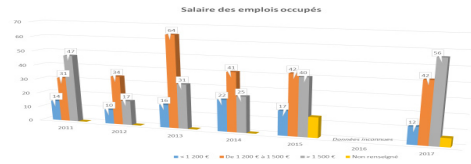


Figure 11. wages of jobs held

(k) Examples of the kinds of jobs held by sandwich-course leavers

- ✓ communication manager;
- ✓ communication assistant;
- ✓ research officer;
- ✓ project site supervisor;
- ✓ sales representative;
- ✓ accountant;
- ✓ construction superintendent;
- ✓ client services advisor;
- ✓ PR officer;
- ✓ PR assistant;
- ✓ quality control specialist;
- ✓ risk prevention engineer, laboratory technician;
- ✓ customer support assistant;
- ✓ network leakage technician;
- ✓ webdesigner...

(l) Situation of sandwich-course leavers continuing in education at another faculty

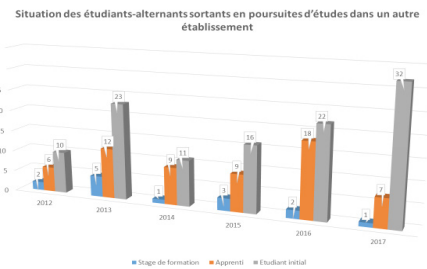


Figure 12. Situation of sandwich-course leavers continuing in education

(m) Reasons pushing sandwich-course leavers to continue education at another faculty

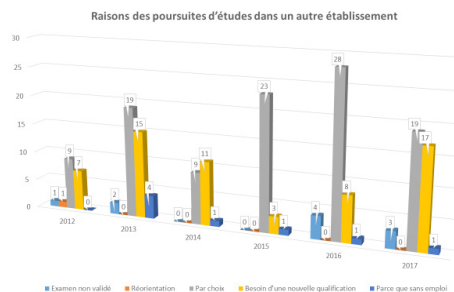


Figure 13. Reasons pushing sandwich-course leavers to continue in education at another faculty

In the perspective of the regional development of the knowledge economy and competence in general and the aim of strategic orientation in vocational training in higher education in particular, the findings of the seven CFA–UNIV-led apprenticeship-to-work surveys provide the island’s public policymakers with concrete figures and trendlines.

A handful of key figures (**seven-year average figures**) light this obvious reality:

(1) 67,5% of sandwich-course leavers are in employment at 6 months after the last vocational training course attended;

(2) 87% of job contracts held fit the vocational training course(s) attended, with 82% located in Corsica;

(3) 54% of job contracts held are sustainable employment prospects, of which 6% are tied to sustainable entrepreneurship projects;

(4) 39% of these positions correspond to a take-home monthly salary (before bonuses) of over €1500;

(5) 90% of decisions to continue in education were driven by personal reasons and a need for further qualifications, with only 3% prompted by failure to find a job;

(6) 70% of job contracts held are in microenterprises and small businesses, in line with the structured entrepreneurial fabric of Corsica’s island economy.

The University of Corsica sandwich-placement system is not just a gateway into employment but also a pathway to excellence, as 74% of graduates completing the 34 all-population courses (pure-graduate students, sandwich-placement students, employees) are sandwich-placement students.

3. The Dynamic of the CFA UNIV’s Activity within the Framework of the Law for the Freedom to Choose one’s Professional Future: a Perspective in Search of Foundation

At a time when the economy of knowledge and competence is conveyed as THE solution to an endemic crisis, the CFA UNIV strives to contribute, in particular, to the construction of a consolidated and lasting plan for structuring the socio-economic fabric through the optimised management of an enhanced training/information system, supervision and individualized monitoring of the vocational guidance of students-apprentices from the University of Corsica.

While the reform on *vocational training for employment and social democracy* finalized the decentralization of vocational training by giving regions the means for a more coherent action and placed them as a pilot for the construction of training policies (8), the recent law for *the freedom to choose one’s professional future* recentralises the regulation of continuing vocational training and sandwich courses. From now on, a new public institution, *France Competences*, will replace the regions by ensuring the missions

previously devolved to the latter (**In particular, financial equalization missions, monitoring and evaluation of the quality of the training actions provided, the observation of costs and levels of support for training with regard to public or pooled funds.**). This development will not fail to impact the governance of the CFA, especially those of Higher Education anchored in the small territories.

3.1 The Philosophy of a Law on Vocational Training in Contradiction with the Specific Prerogatives Allocated to the Corsican Collectivity (See earlier under point V)

Following orders for the strengthening of the social dialogue dear to President Macron, whose objective is to converge the imperative of economic performance with that of social progress, the law of 5 September 2018 *for the freedom to choose one’s professional future* must bring new rights to French citizens and give them the means to build their own career path through protections collective. The government claims to have made the bet of trust in the actors, enterprises, employees and the social partners in order to remove the barriers to the hiring enterprises and to enshrine the notion of competences as a key issue at the heart the professional project, both individual and collective.

According to Muriel Pénicaud, the Minister of Labour who wears the law, it integrates the ambition of social emancipation through work and training: “...to ensure that growth benefits everyone, so that everyone can choose and not endure his or her professional life, this legislation allows for simpler, faster, broader and fairer access to the major asset of the 21st century: the skills” (**In Hérault Juridique & Economique of August 2, 2018, <https://heraultjuridique.com/juridique/droit-social-lois/la-liberte-de-choisir-son-avenir-professionnel-les-10-points-cles/>**).

To this end, the reform refocuses the regulation of continuing vocational training and sandwich course by disposing the regions of the prerogatives relating to the management of the construction of training policies, in particular the tasks of financial equalisation, monitoring and evaluating the quality of training measures provided, monitoring costs and levels of support for training in the case of public or pooled funds.

Beyond the proven lack of consistency inherent in the devolutions attributed to the regions by the reform on *vocational training for employment and social democracy* of March 6th, 2014, which promulgated the regional area as the most relevant geographical and legal environment for the production of vocational training schemes (**Particularly in the combined fields of training of specific audiences or of the knowledge base for job seekers, but also with regard to the financing of the remuneration of all job**

seekers without compensation, trainees in vocational training and accompanying candidates for the Validation of Acquis de l'Expérience (VAE), development and management of sandwich course contracts (in particular apprenticeship) as well as the ability to influence the distribution of the free funds of the apprenticeship tax will no longer be included in the competences previously allocated to the regions. This reality will not fail to create a precedent in terms of legal contradiction or, at the very least, to generate an overlay of ambivalent legislative provisions.

In fact, within the framework of the law of decentralization relating to the Corsica region, the Corsican Collectivity exercises specific prerogatives, particularly in the field of the design and development of vocational training in relation to the immanent needs of the island territory. As such, a CPRDFOP has set over the period 2018-2022 objectives clearly focused on meeting the needs of the economic fabric and securing pathways to employment through, in particular, a qualitative development of the sandwich course system :

(1) Meeting the needs of the economic fabric and securing pathways to employment:

- a. by identifying the needs of the regional economy;
- b. by ensuring respect for balanced territorial development;
- c. by providing all the people with access to training and a first level of qualification.

(2) Welcome, inform, guide and accompany the people in an equitable manner throughout the territory.

(3) Revitalize the sandwich course:

- a. by strengthening relationships between enterprises, reception structures and training centres;
- b. by promoting and developing sandwich course opportunities;
- c. by preventing breakdowns of apprenticeship contracts;
- d. by seeking new niches for the development of sandwich course system.

(4) Strengthening quality practices in the training system.

(5) Promote the social and professional integration of young people and adults in a balanced territorial development approach.

In the context of the reorientation of the regulation of vocational training and sandwich course training, the territorialisation of actions in this combined field, as a result of the efforts made so far by the Corsican Collectivity, incurs a potential risk of distortion resulting in a loss of operability and efficiency to the detriment of the local economy.

3.2 The CFA's Activity of Higher Education Affected by the Liberalization of the Apprenticeship System

The essential issue of the law *for the freedom to choose one's professional future* concerns the nature of the skills

placed at the center of each citizen's individual training project, but also seen as the cornerstone of the right response to business hiring needs.

In a socioeconomic environment at the heart of which 50% of occupations will have to change in the next ten years, companies say they are not in a position to have sufficient skills to realize development opportunities. At the same time, manual workers and employees in very small enterprises and small and medium-sized organisations have half as much access to training as managers and employees in large enterprises^[9] (**According to a report of the Labour's Ministry of 24 August 2018 pp.14-15.**). The new law is supposed to offer every citizen the opportunity to train, develop their careers and adapt to changes in the world of work.

With a view to building a new skills society, the apprenticeship system has been heavily liberalised and simplified in order to increase its attractiveness to enterprises and to develop it at all levels of qualification (**The law gives every company the opportunity to open its CFA.**). In this respect, while certain measures seem particularly appropriate (extension of the age for taking apprenticeship training to 30, the possibility of integrating a course offered throughout the year, the growth of bridges between the status of the "classical" student and the student-apprentice, the increased modalities of the international mobility of alternants ...) ; on the other hand, other guidelines laid down by the law are questionable, particularly those which attracted the creation of the CFA and the financing of training costs.

Virtually total liberalisation on the opening of a CFA, until then conditioned by the signature of a five-year creation agreement under the aegis of the Region, inevitably poses the problem of evaluating the new version of the apprenticeship system, particularly in the context of territories with very specific characteristics.

In order to contextualize the thinking in the case of a small island economy, the Corsican Collectivity established, until 31 December 2018, quantitative criteria to be respected and qualitative references to be achieved setting a course and objectives. In connection with these established guidelines, the CFA UNIV, like all other island CFA, was awarded an annual operating grant conditional on enrolment in accredited apprenticeship courses.

The governance model of the apprenticeship system in the Corsica region was then assimilated to a mixed system characterising a logic of administered funding of the CFA in connection with specific prerogatives allocated to the latter in the nature of training subject to regional accreditation. More specifically in the field of Higher Education, the result was an activity of the CFA UNIV comparable to that of an agent developing skills in the region in symbiosis with the orientations advocated by the CPRDFOP (see *supra* point 1.).

The new law establishes a so-called CFA *market financing logic*, by refocusing the regulation of the apprenticeship system around the prerogatives of a new national public institution, *France competences*, having in particular the responsibility of evaluating the costs of training necessarily homogeneous and standard, whatever the characteristics of geographical location of the CFA.

Even though the national sectors of professional activity will co-construct the vocational training diplomas with the State in order to better meet the skills needs of the enterprises, the fact remains that the hitherto concrete links between the regions and the CFA will incur the risk of distension at the expense of developing the skills needed by local businesses.

Finally, it should be noted that in the limited field of higher education training, the new law provides for the abolition of financial incentives for companies providing apprenticeship contracts, which will not fail to impact the activity dynamics of the CFA involved in the development of these specific training courses.

4. Conclusion

The last decade has changed the missions allocated to public institutions of higher education, particularly universities, with a view to organizing a first level of porosity between initial training and the professional world. The development of alternated internships and the dynamics of sandwich course training have made it possible to establish the degree of employability of graduate students and to contribute to the structuring of enterprises by combining two essential complementary: *knowledge* and *competence*.

The major national reform of the law for the freedom to choose one's professional future will radically change the economic model of the CFA in general, and those of higher education in particular. By refocusing the governance of sandwich course training and vocational training, the French government takes responsibility for putting an end to territorial regulation of actions in this combined field, by reorganising a silo training system at a time when networking and cross-border skills are the future.

The regional management of vocational training, hitherto in perfect harmony with the development of skills in relation to clearly identified needs in companies based in the territory, will be by effect of closed dominoes to the detriment of an adequate formation of human resources.

If Corsica is concerned by a specific status as regards regional prerogatives, there is no guarantee that the local executive will remain in a position to devise a plan for the construction of an island economy of knowledge and competence.

From then on, it will belong to the regional CFA, as

agents developer of diploma and qualification courses in harmony with the expectations expressed by the island economic fabric, to develop a necessary capacity for innovation in the pedagogical engineering of the actions carried out allowing both the growth of students' qualifications and the conversion or reconversion of career paths to the benefit of a small territory in search of attractiveness. This is the whole challenge of the emergence of a new lifelong learning model, a guarantee of the evolution and security of career paths, to which the CFA UNIV will seek to contribute through the evolution of its business dynamics.

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