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Title:

**Social investment and the problem of social sustainability: The case of French activation
policies**

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This proposal¹ addresses the second and sixth key questions: “Analytical works on the impact of the policies undertaken in the current economic crisis on the employment model” / “Works on the systems of social protection, their relation with economic policies and their impact on social sustainability”.

Abstract:

Our paper/communication will focus on French recent reforms of labour market and inclusion policies to examine and question their social sustainability – the access to social resources for future generations (access and quality of social protection and services). In a context of ageing societies and slowing down growth rates, there is a large advocacy of turning traditional social protection (mainly in the form of income support/compensation) into “social investment” (Giddens 1998, Esping-Andersen 2002) aiming both at investing in the well-being and education of children and youth (and expecting economic as well as social returns from this investment) and promoting full employment through “active welfare”. Recent trends in French employment and inclusion policies, in line with the “social investment” strategy, aim at promoting an “active welfare state” in order to reconcile social solidarity with economic sustainability through full-employment. “Active welfare state” is a general concept that encompasses a wide range of policies and takes different meanings according to the welfare state or activation regime. France is usually referred to as a bismarckian welfare state where

¹ Our proposition relies on a research (survey and empirical research) on “Activating the unemployed, institutions, policies and dynamics” led by four university research teams (GREE-2L2S Nancy 2 University, CES-Matisse Paris 1 University, CRESS-Lessor Rennes 2 University and the Centre for employment studies) for the French DARES-Ministry of employment and solidarity (BERAUD, EYDOUX 2009).

entitlements to social rights rely on both the employment status and the family. Recent shifts in activation policies turn traditional bismarckian welfare and income support schemes into “active welfare”, promoting active citizenship” by giving more responsibilities and duties to the unemployed and the assisted, even for categories that were previously exempted from the obligation to work such as lone parents – mainly mothers – (Eydoux and Letablier 2009).

A brief overview of unemployment compensation and social assistance in France will shed light on the evolving social status of non employed citizen: this status appears as both segmented and challenged by recent orientations that increase their duties. Then the analysis of recent trends in the French activation strategy will show that public interventions to favour employment plays a role in the weakening status of working citizen who are increasingly exposed to particular forms of work. To conclude, the way these employment and social policy reforms (conducted in the name of economic and social sustainability) actually challenge social sustainability will be questioned – to what extent a “social investment” perspective is liable to reconcile social sustainability with economic constraints?

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