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# **Multilevel Governance and the Challenges of Integration and Coordination in Anti-Poverty Policies: the French Experience Between Change and Continuity**

*Paper prepared for the 27<sup>th</sup> IPSA World Congress, Buenos Aires, 15-19 July 2023*

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Abstract:

*This paper addresses the issues of coordination and integration of public action in the field of anti-poverty policies. It is based on a recent analysis of the conceptualization and implementation of the "Stratégie nationale de prévention et de lutte contre la pauvreté " (national poverty action strategy SNPLP) from 2018 to 2021 in France. Indeed, this strategy was intended to be emblematic of a desire to profoundly transform the "governance" of poverty in France. From a new political vision focused on the activation of the resources of vulnerable people, the strategy tries to improve the integration of both traditional sectoral policies (social, education, and public health) and multi-scalar systems of actors (central administrations, deconcentrated administrations, local authorities, and associative actors).*

*However, this strategy faces different major obstacles in the policy-making process. It illustrates the tensions between, on the one hand, mechanisms of intersectorality and territorialization that contribute to giving a form of coherence to the strategy and, on the other hand, sectoral mechanisms and territorial fragmentation of initiatives that weaken it, or at least cause it to lose some of its initial transformative power.*

*Our paper will focus on the variables that explain this tension between policy integration and fragmentation. With regard to the first dimension, we will analyse in particular the reference to the social investment theory, the affirmation of presidential leadership, the creation of an ad hoc administration, and the implementation of a territorial contractualization based on monitoring indicators. In the second dimension, we will highlight the impact of several crises on ministerial and sectoral agendas, the plurality of bureaucratic interests intervening in the policy field of "poverty" and the variation of local systems (local authorities and associative networks) involved in the implementation of anti-poverty policies*

The expansion of a welfare state, which began after World War II, is a key feature of States that have become ‘mass producers’ of public policies (Bezes and Pierru 2019; King and Le Galès 2017). This is particularly the case in countries like France that have historically devoted a significant share of their wealth to social policy (Castel 1995; De Swan 1995; Paugam 2007). For decades, the central State and its specific administrations, the various related agencies, as well as territorial authorities<sup>1</sup> and associations have deployed a complex set of social intervention measures (Aquilera and Rouzeau 2020; Epstein 2015; Lafore 2020; Pasquier *et al.* 2013). This accumulation of public policies raises the question of whether they are coherent and to what extent they converge.

This paper therefore attempts to take a close look at the questions of coordination and integration of public action in a social policy field that is ‘saturated’ with sectorial and territorialized measures. We draw from an analysis of the recent establishment of a domain of public action concerning poverty, in particular from 2018 to 2020, involving the formulation and implementation of the French “*Stratégie nationale de prévention et de lutte contre la pauvreté*” (national poverty action strategy – SNPLP)<sup>2</sup>. During the first months of Emmanuel Macron’s presidency, the SNPLP was held up as the symbol of a volition to totally transform the ‘governance’ of poverty in France by interlinking it with a global strategy inspired by social investment (Avenel *et al.* 2017; Palier *et al.* 2022) for both traditional sectorial policies (social, medical-social, education, health) and systems featuring multi-scale actors (central administrations, devolved administrations, agencies, local authorities, associations). Yet, unlike a preventative approach mainly aimed at developing human capital and stimulating the resources of vulnerable people, the way that the SNPLP was implemented means that, at the national level, it had to work with what was ‘already there’. The impact of the ‘yellow vest’ crisis followed by the pandemic triggered a return to social protectionism and charity activities in France. Thus the SNPLP constitutes a particularly useful laboratory to investigate the tensions underlying public action between, on the one side, the intersectoral and territorial adaption mechanisms that help make strategy more coherent and pertinent (O’Flynn *et al.* 2013) and, on the other side, the mechanisms of re-sectoralization (Muller 1990) and the territorial fragmentation of initiatives that weaken a strategy, or at least diminish some of its initial transformative power.

Our paper focuses on the variables that help explain this tension between (sectorial and territorial) integration and (sectorial and territorial) autonomy. Concerning the first dimension, we will in particular analyse the reference to social investment, the affirmation of presidential policy leadership, the creation of ad hoc administrations (inter-ministerial delegation and poverty commissioners), and the promotion of key measures, territorial contracting, and the establishment of monitoring indicators. For the second dimension, we will centre on the impact of the health crisis and the electoral cycle on ministerial and sectoral agendas, the plural nature of ‘bureaucratic work’ involved in the ‘poverty’ category (solidarity of rights), freedom of administration by local authorities, their unequal political capacities and their different levels of engagement in action against poverty (*départements* and municipalities) and, lastly, the

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<sup>1</sup> French administrative division with an elected form of local government.

<sup>2</sup> This paper draws from the first results and empirical data collected in the research project ‘*Gouvernance multiniveaux et stratégie nationale de prévention et de lutte contre la pauvreté (SNPLP). La perspective de l’investissement social à l’épreuve de la complexité politico-administrative française*’ financed by France Stratégie in 2020-21. Under the scientific coordination of Romain Pasquier and Marc Rouzeau, a research team at the Arènes (UMR 6051) laboratory carried out an original investigation comprising 120 interviews during 2020-21 at national, regional and *département* scale (5 regions and 15 *départements*) with the aim of deciphering both the cognitive matrix and the instrumentation proposed by the SNPLP, along with the different ways that it is employed by territorial actor systems.

empowerment of some local anti-poverty systems at the intersection of association networks and territorial authorities.

## **1. Emergence of a public action field: dispersal, sedimentation and ordering**

The oil crisis of the 1970s called into question the prevailing belief that growth was the main source of social development. In parallel, the ‘sustainability’ of the welfare system no longer seemed definitively guaranteed. The result was an accumulation of forms of social intervention involving the maintenance of assistance and protectionism, combined with a diversification of forms of social intervention, a combination of different types of regulation (sectoral measures, decentralization, socio-territorial strategies, etc.), Europeanization mechanisms translated by a double rhetoric of social cohesion and inclusion, and, in France, the invention of ‘active solidarity’.

In this context of accumulation, starting from 2013, poverty became the target of intersectoral ‘national mobilization’: the new connections made between hitherto dispersed initiatives gave rise to the institutionalization of a new field of public action. Emerging from this background, and marked by ambitions put forward as deeply transformative, the SNPLP (2017-2022) for a while became a fairly consequential vehicle for integration. This shift involved the promotion of social investment, the alignment of government authorities, the enrolment of multiple stakeholders, and the intended, sometimes successful, alignment of numerous measures resulting from more or less autonomous sectoral rationales.

### **1.1. Pluralization of references and sedimentation of measures**

Sometimes separately devised and coordinated, sometimes managed in a more unified way, the social-territorial strategies and insertion policies that began to emerge in the 1980s attempted to do away with the fear of exclusion, in particular among the middle and working classes. Centred on social housing neighbourhoods, socio-urban interventions involved inter-ministerial bodies focused on urban policy and the elected representatives of ‘urban governments’ (Tissot 2007; Epstein 2013). During the same period, in an attempt to intersect attribution, contracts with beneficiaries, and socio-professional support, inclusion policies mobilized sectoral central administrations (social affairs and, to lesser extent, work and employment) and the *départements* (administrative divisions). This was combined with charity work done by associations and *Centres communaux d’action sociale* (municipal social action centres – CCAS) (Frigoli, 2010).

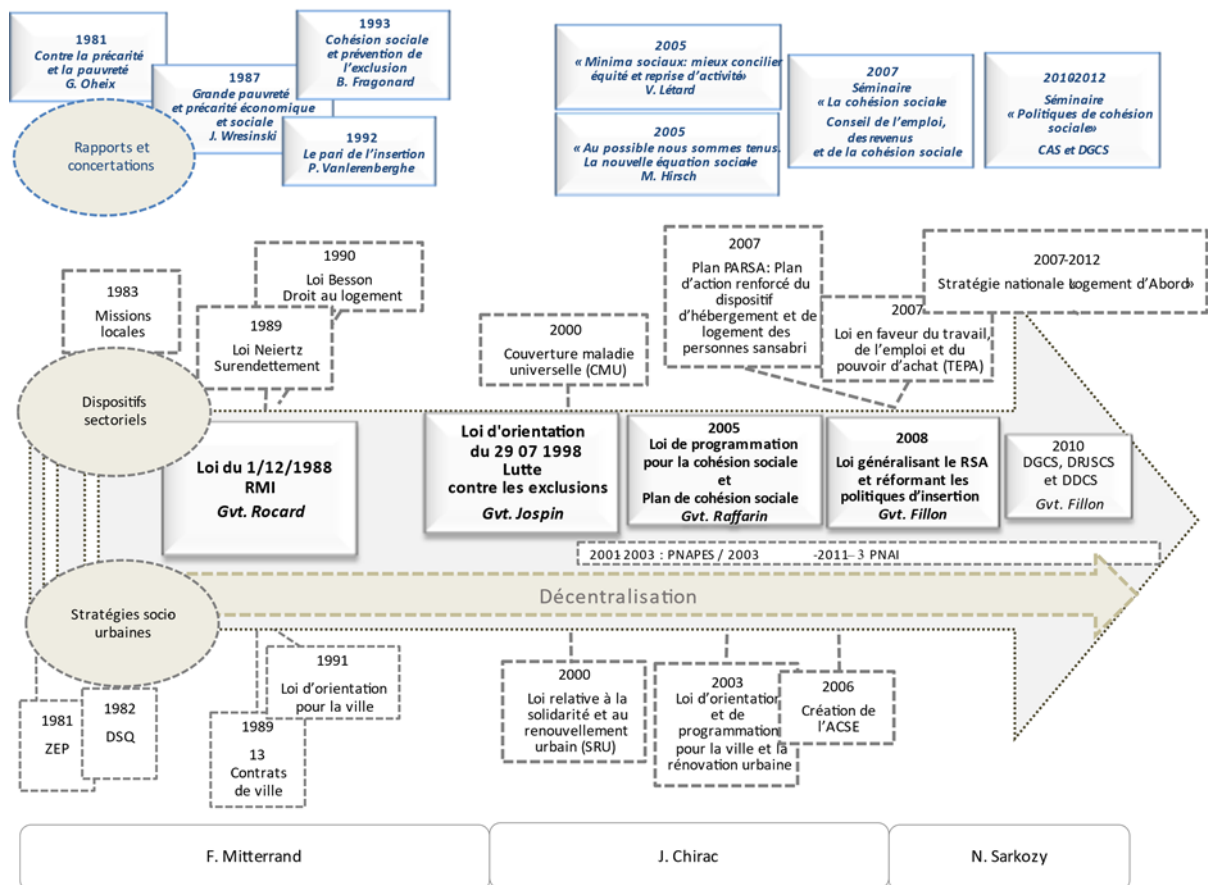
At the same time, the institutional landscape became more diverse following different decentralization phases, which made the *départements* responsible for social action (Lafore 2004, 2013). In addition, it became denser and more complex as a result of the more widespread use of public action contracts (Gaudin 2007), the systematic implementation of calls for tender, and the increased role of national and regional agencies (Benamouzig, Besançon 2008). In parallel, with different levels of implementation, a ‘territorial administration’ model that put the emphasis on ‘arrangements’ between Prefects and key figures, generated a variety of territorial differences (Duran, Thoenig 1996).

At the same time as this diversification of types of intervention and institutional complexification, through the international circulation of ideas, new references (activation, inclusion, social cohesion, etc.) came to join the principles of equality and solidarity of rights

characteristic of the French welfare system (Warin 2020). In parallel, the promotion of decompartmentalization and calls for a more transversal approach generated numerous import-exports with the sectors of education and training, housing, employment, health, and even culture and sport (Garraud 2000; Ballain 2005). In addition, increasing references were made to sustainable development and empowerment, leading to a multiplication of socially just representations.

Thus, with the arrival of the 2000s, the combination of these multiple references and strategic options, the diverse adjustments conceded to the local level, and the mass of measures, rendered the social political landscape disparate and irregular. In this context of accumulation, although the sequencing and sectoral homogeneity of social action were put to the test, the fight against poverty, which had for a long time been a residual object of public action, progressively took shape and became institutionalized (Viguié 2020).

**Figure 1. The institutionalization of poverty action**  
**Stage 1 – Sedimentation of measures and emergence of a field of action (1980 – 2010)**



In this relatively fragmented landscape, the *Plans nationaux pour l'inclusion sociale* (national plans for social inclusion – PNAI) (2001-2003; 2003-2005; 2006-2008 and 2008-2011) were a first attempt to achieve a degree of consistency. The PNAIs, formulated at the request of European bodies, featured an aggregation of measures and proposed budget consolidation. In addition to this formal gathering together, PNAIs acted as vehicles to disseminate the action

principles championed by the EU in the social field, e.g. child poverty action, access to rights, and participation by the people concerned.

## 1.2. Renewal of elites and trajectory for reform

The whole of this period also saw an at least partial renewal of the ‘welfare elites’<sup>3</sup>, which supported the trajectory for reform in terms of protection and social action. Following the ministerial engagements of Xavier Emmanuelli and Bernard Kouchner in France, this new momentum resulted from the coming together of: efforts made by major associations grouped since 1994 into the Alerte collective and their representatives (François Soulage, Véronique Fayet, Christophe Robert, etc.); emblematic business personalities (Louis Gallois, Louis Schweitzer, etc.) and trade union figures (François Chérèque, Laurent Berger, etc.); and the activities of personalities from unusual backgrounds (Martin Hirsch, Olivier Noblecourt, etc.), and some elected representatives, often local, opting to enter this field of action to strengthen their political position (Michel Dinet, Mathieu Klein, Frédéric Bierry, Brigitte Bourguignon, etc.). The new generation of welfare elites was also fuelled by the mobilization of researchers, some of whom attempted to combine sociological analysis and public action (Bruno Palier, Nicolas Duvoux, Julien Damon, Cyprien Avenel, etc.), while others promoted economic and experimental evaluation in the field of education, professional integration and the fight against poverty (Esther Duflo, François Bourguignon, Yannick L’Horty, Marc Gurgand, etc.) (Arrignon 2021).

Without forming a true ‘public policy community’, these actors were drivers and disseminators of convergence on numerous subjects, i.e. consideration of social expenditure as an investment and the primacy of prevention; promotion of the notions of cohesion and inclusion leading to the relativization of category-specific policies; the aim of securing more efficient social administrations; improved access to social rights through a simplification of the benefits system; more dynamic local solidarities coupled with solidarity of rights; promotion of intervention and support conceived and implemented locally; dissemination of the notion of pathways; reinforcement of the power to act and participative approaches; development of social engineering and results-based management, etc. Gradually, these elements fed into the hotbed of ‘social reform’, although some subjects led to differences, if not opposition: use of targeting or reference to universalism; questions concerning benefits amounts and conditions; respective roles of the State and local authorities; encouragement of entrepreneurial approaches or the use of philanthropy in building social action, for example.

## 1.3. Specific tools and social investment perspective

Reflecting demands made by charities, following on from the strategic alignment encouraged by the PNAIs, and constituting a central element of the social reform trajectory promoted by the ‘new’ welfare elites, the *Plan pluriannuel contre la pauvreté et pour l’inclusion sociale* (2013-2017), followed by the *Stratégie nationale de prévention et de lutte contre la pauvreté* (2018-2022) were adopted and implemented, the former under François Hollande’s presidency and the latter under Emmanuel Macron.

Led by François Chérèque – former national figure of the new trade unionism – the structure of the *Plan Pauvreté* (poverty action plan) comprised a particularly long multi-sectoral list of 61

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<sup>3</sup> Note that the notion of elite here refers to the “transforming role that can be played by collective actors structured by shared conceptions. These actors, whom we qualify as programmatic, form a new elite when they succeed in governing a public policy domain” ( Genieys, Hassenteufel, 2012, p.91).

measures. Advocating consultation, territorialization, participation and the development of committed solidarity (Bouquet, Jaeger 2019), the *Plan Pauvreté* (2013-2017) moved away from the benefit-focused, protectionist direction – and beyond that, from essentially legislative and regulatory enactment – of the historically highly centralized French social action system. In addition, the SNPLP was strongly inspired by a social investment perspective (*perspective d'investissement social* – peIS). As a vehicle of political integration, peIS densified the backbone of anticipated action, thus bringing together, while adjusting, a whole set of a priori composite measures, from the fields of education and training, health, and social work.

Inspired by the Swedish model, in the United Kingdom this type of social investment took the form of the ‘Third Way’ driven by Tony Blair, involving strong mobilization to combat child poverty, followed by the ‘Big Society’ programme pursued by David Cameron’s government (Blair, Giddens, 2002; Faucher-King, Le Galès 2007). When taken up by the European authorities, this reference to social investment considers that social expenditure can, in certain conditions, represent economic intervention associated with a positive return. To achieve this, peIS proposes reinforcing human capital with the aim of developing individuals’ skills, employability and autonomy. The first step involves investing in childcare, education and training and improving support to enter the work market, while targeting some measures at the most socially vulnerable people and groups (Jenson 2009; Nicole-Drancourt 2015). A reference to peIS involves building intersectoral public policy strategies and evaluating the results and impacts. For supporters of this approach, identifying that an intervention truly corresponds to a social investment involves measuring its impacts on social and economic development. Our recent research and testimonials gathered from key SNPLP actors concur in considering that, in terms of its initial ambitions and orientations, the SNPLP translated a clear preference of national public authorities for this perspective. The same result emerges from our examination of the measures decided on at its launch and taken up by the Evaluation Committee: in our view, 34 of the 35 initial measures can be considered as relating to peIS.

Illustrating the close involvement of public authorities, the deployment of these two specific tools (the *Plan Pauvreté* then the SNPLP), and the mobilization of peIS, contribute to make poverty action a field of public action in its own right, thus backing up the statement by Charlotte Halpern and Patrick Le Galès (2011): “All autonomous public action should have its own instruments”. In addition, conceived at the top and piloted from the top, this instrumentation underlines ‘the nodality of the state’ in the field of social policies nevertheless presented as mostly decentralized.

#### **1.4. Leadership and daring to modernize**

When it was launched, the SNPLP was presented as one of the major projects of President Macron’s first term. This is illustrated by the president’s initial involvement, the creation of an ad hoc inter-ministerial delegation (the DIPLP) headed by a recognized expert, Olivier Noblecourt, and the establishment of a regional network of Commissioners. Moving away from social protectionism and a rationale of benefits and charity work, the initial targets were early childhood, school dropout, training, and job-hunting strategies. This involved aligning local initiatives with the national framework and involving as many stakeholders as possible through intense cooperation; extending a strategy initially targeting children to become more wide-ranging; coordination at both national and regional levels; multi-level contracts initially aimed at the *départements* and then major cities and regions; and a particularly ambitious participation objective.

The combination of a ceremonial launch featuring a presidential announcement on 13 September 2018, the appointment of an inter-ministerial delegate appreciated for both his experience of education and social issues and his sympathetic but combative style, and some smoothly orchestrated communication quickly attracted interest. The testimonials gathered mention a strong national mood during the first period, in particular due to the alignment of government authorities and the involvement of central administrations, social protection bodies and *Pôle Emploi* (job centres). Despite initial reticence from local authorities put off by the limitations of their initiatives as advocated by the Pacte de Cahors, the initial, well-oiled and promising ‘narrative’ generated unparalleled inter-institutional mobilization: following in the steps of a dozen ‘pilot territories’, most *départements* signed a contract with the central state. The association sector was also keen, with national, regional and local representatives getting involved in the numerous work groups established (15 per region).

To tackle the accumulation and dispersal of objects generated by the growing solidarity of public action – in other words, the dissemination of social objectives in numerous public policies (education, housing, culture, employment, health, etc.) (Ballain 2005), the SNPLP was designed to sustain a preventative policy to combat poverty. To ensure that it remained consistent, the challenge was to successfully promote the doctrinal peIS base without upsetting the various sensitivities and ideologies, and to put forward the key measures that would form the backbone of the SNPLP, i.e. a social diversity bonus to encourage the opening of childcare places, free breakfasts at schools in priority areas, prevention of sudden exits from *Aide sociale à l'enfance* (childhood social benefits– ASE), shorter guidance periods for beneficiaries of RSA (income support), etc. In order to reinforce this new domain of public action, those driving it also worked to recycle and converge numerous initiatives previously approached from a sectoral angle: halving of first year primary classes, action to combat school dropout and obligatory training for 16-18 year-olds, the ‘*Logement d’abord*’ (housing first) programme, establishment of universal social childcare and contact social workers, plan to upgrade social work, etc. All of the above was supported by the creation of numerous, varied tools: scientific council, national and regional conferences, media presentations, a digital collaborative platform, multiple roadmaps, and showcasing of a range of results indicators, etc.

At this stage, adjusting and ordering everything was not important: to maintain the spirit of SNPLP advocates and in the name of an ambition with strong political backing, the focus was on opening up the administrative game. This involved shaking up institutional timetables and avoiding excessively rigid planning operations. Reminiscent of the heyday of the *politique de la ville* (urban policy) and the creation of the *Revenu minimum d’insertion* (minimum income allowance – RMI), the launch of the SNPLP therefore shook up the numerous mindsets in place and constituted an attempt to ideologically and strategically reorganize the social policy field, in particular ideas and action relating to prevention and to mobilizing the people concerned.



## 2. Integration under pressure: economic shocks and territorial rollout

Public policies are subject to continuity and change processes that need to be analysed to examine the scope of reforms and the integrating capacity of public action measures. In this area, in the 1960s and 1970s, major authors like Charles Lindblom (1959) and Aaron Wildavsky (1975) identified the relative inertia of public action. Advocates of incrementalism considered that, in general, actors ‘muddle through’, opting to make minimal decisions based on the lowest common denominator in a fragmented, complex system of actors. Pursuing a neo-institutionalist vein, Paul Pierson (2000) insisted on the ‘pathway dependence’ mechanisms that characterize social policies due to institutional density (procedures, regulations, etc.), the eminently collective nature of the political field, and the complexity of the political arena (interweaving of public and private interests, limited information, influence of electoral cycles).

Thus, the ambitions for integration present throughout the SNPLP’s establishment and implementation came up against three types of resistance and/or obstacles: economic shocks that led the government to moderate the cognitive and strategic approach; a collapse of political-administrative support that facilitated a return to sectoral agendas; and erratic implementation due to the diverse range of existing local setups and their unequal mobilization in terms of poverty action.

### 2.1 Economic shocks, cognitive moderation and strategic reopening

Public policy studies centred on ‘crises’ (Hassenteufel and Saurugger 2021) and ‘critical situations’ (Capoccia and Kelemen 2007) point out that they can be factors of change, sometimes widescale change. In our case, the succession of two economic shocks: the ‘yellow vest’ crisis from November 2018, and the Covid-19 crisis from March 2020, on the contrary led to a moderation of the SNPLP doctrine and strategy.

The ‘yellow vest’ crisis brought to the fore the fear of social downscaling experienced by the working classes (Duvoux, Papuchon 2018), and thus highlighted the deleterious impacts of social-territorial divisions, along with related feelings of disparagement, social injustice and contempt (Rosanvallon 2021). The response, in the form of an increase in the *prime d’activité* (activity bonus) announced by Emmanuel Macron on 9 December 2018 and leading to the decree of 21 December, marked, if not a return to a kind of social protectionism, at least a reworking of the initial peIS intentions far removed from a benefits-based rationale. In parallel, the government decided to drop the planned reform of the *Revenu universel d’activité* (universal activity income – RUA), which had been put forward as one of the two key reforms of the SNPLP, along with the *Service public de l’insertion et de l’emploi* (public service for integration and employment – SPIE). The aim of the reform was to simplify the French social benefits system by merging a number of allowances and paying them automatically to avoid non-take-up. Subject to numerous debates, the reform did not ultimately go through, resulting in a return to the former situation featuring dispersed, non-contribution-based allowances. Veering from postponements to renunciation, this first crisis illustrated the difficulty of changing the game of inter-sectoral integration.

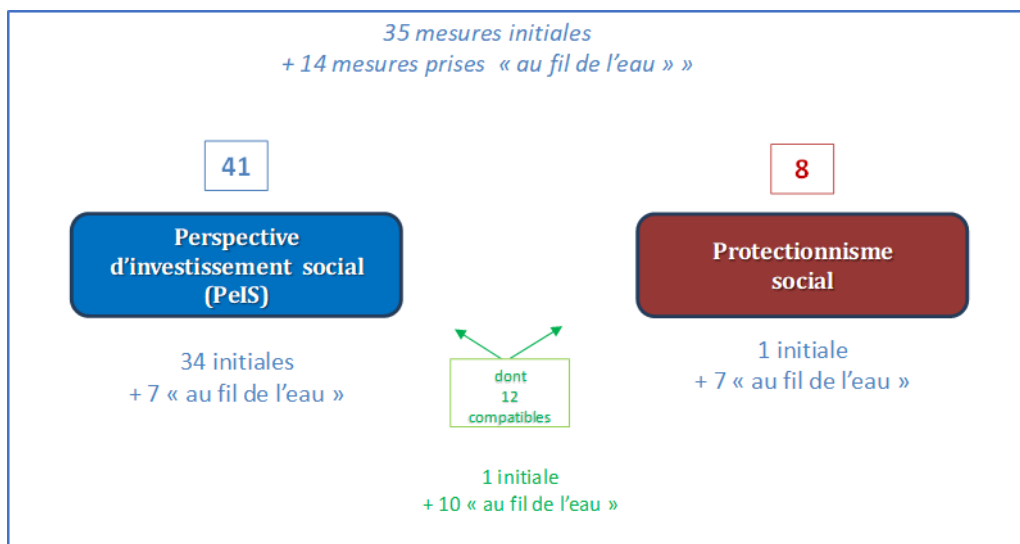
The second economic shock, the Covid-19 pandemic coupled with a social crisis, undermined the establishment of agreements with the *départements* and some measures like obligatory training for young people. The coordination of the SNPLP was also put to the test: meetings and exchanges between actors from institutions and associations ran out of steam; regional

working groups could only meet remotely and their work slowed down; participation by the people concerned was severely limited. More widely, the health crisis upset schedules and called into question the trajectory of the French social action system. Priorities concerning professional integration, youth and housing were reinforced, and support for purchasing power found new legitimacy. Areas of action that had been partially or totally put aside, like the consideration of extreme social exclusion, food aid and shelter, the fight against social isolation in particular in rural locations, the digital divide, and questions relating to mental health became the new focus of poverty action policies.

As part of the ensuing recovery plan, the French government devoted 100 million euros to financing projects to help socially excluded sections of the population deal with the crisis. In particular, this took the form of a support plan launched in November 2020 for national and local associations working on poverty action. Measures to reinforce food aid were also set up, along with an exceptional solidarity support package for those most in difficulty (young people, low-income families, and people on minimum social benefits). In addition, a call for expression of interest (CEI) concerned innovative support targeting people experiencing extreme social exclusion and addictions. These developments saw some outsiders gain or regain a foothold, such as some charities, municipalities through their local social action centres (CCAS), and some citizen initiatives and local networks that, at least for a while, were propelled to centre stage, thus extending the network of actors involved.

Looking back, it is clear that these two shocks contributed to a less asserted use of peIS and prevention. Thus, following on from the initial 35 measures, at least 10 of the 14 measures that emerged appear to be compatible with social protectionism (cf. Figure 2).

**Figure 2. Characterization of SNPLP measures (2018-2021)**



In sum, the combination of doctrinal moderation, more wide-ranging types of action, and more diverse legitimate actors impaired the coherent, discriminating – and thus integrating – character of the SNPLP.

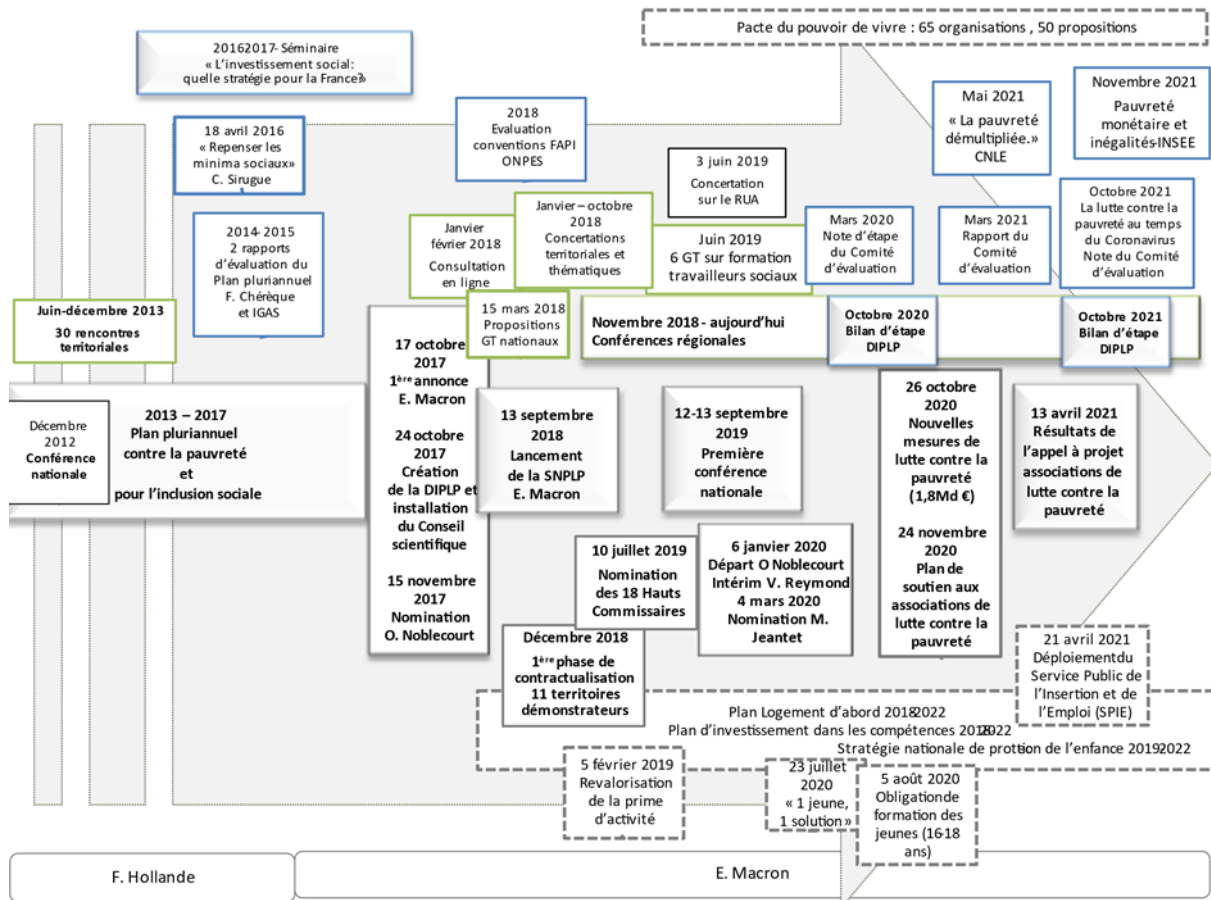
## 2.2 Management shift and the return to sectoral agendas

In addition to the impact of economic shocks, in the space of three years, the political-administrative management of the SNPLP changed. In its initial format, the DIPLP (*Délégué interministériel à la prévention et à la lutte contre la pauvreté* – inter-ministerial delegate for poverty action) corresponded to Edgard Pisani’s definition of mission administration: “uncomplicated, it has a preference for doing, it is realistic, fluid, it moves towards events; it is involved in life; rather than waiting for initiatives, it solicits them; [...] it is dynamic and involves risks. It is based on the shifting thinking of an individual or a team” (Pisani, 1956, p. 325). The SNPLP was constructed by this kind of administration, in other words, a political-administrative project organization comprising less than ten people headed by Olivier Noblecourt, whose experience of politics, associations and administration made him highly qualified to act, from local to national level with actors combating poverty. But in January 2020, 15 months after its official launch, Olivier Noblecourt left the SNPLP.

The reasons for his departure, which many viewed as a kind of defection, were numerous, ranging from the loss of one of the leaders when Christelle Dubos was named secretary of state, to the attraction of attempting to win an electoral stronghold (Grenoble), and including his weariness of dealing with bureaucracy, financial realities, and unfruitful decisions. This departure, and the fact that in several weeks the DIPLP’s pioneer team abandoned ship, undermined the management of the SNPLP and further eroded the political leadership. Many began to wonder whether the SNPLP was not breaking down, and thus whether this very recent field of action was likely to last.

A new Delegate, Marine Jeantet, was chosen with a less political, more management-based background, aligning the DIPLP more with a central administration direction. The new Delegate employed a less flamboyant style than her predecessor and undertook to represent the SNPLP in parliament before the national evaluation committee and in its relations with the CNLE. In the health crisis context, where financial engagements were confirmed and even consolidated, she ensured the continuity of operations. Operating with a new team and a network of Commissioners ‘working the field’, she managed to keep the SNPLP afloat.

**Figure 3: Institutionalization of the fight against poverty**  
**Stage 2 – Special tools and measures concerning exogenous shocks**



Combined with this cognitive moderation, strategic reopening, and remobilization of historic actors in the fight against poverty, this more management-based orientation of the SNPLP led to a resurgence of sectoral approaches. This can be seen in the evolution of the SNPLP's relations with the different measures launched either by the executive or by legislation. For example, the integration of the 'Housing First' plan into the Strategy was rarely identified by actors, who generally viewed the measure as autonomous. The separate management and rollout of the *Stratégie nationale de prévention et de protection de l'enfance* (national protection strategy for children, 2019-2022) and the *Service public de l'insertion et de l'emploi* (public employment service – SPIE) confirmed the weakening of the SNPLP: led by an ad hoc secretary of state, Adrien Taquet, and coordinated by a former DIPLP member, Vincent Reymond, the national protection strategy for children led to contracts being established with *départements* independently from the contracts system set up as part of the SNPLP, and some of these measures competed with SNPLP measures; although conceived as one of the key areas of the SNPLP, the SPIE was more autonomous since it was led more by the ministry of labour, employment and insertion than by the DIPLP.

Inter-ministerial and transversal objectives then took a back seat with the approach of the 2022 presidential elections. All ministries and divisions entered into a public policy assessment phase that they were responsible for carrying out along with communicating on the results. In this

context of a return to sectoral agendas, decentralized state services became more complex due to more numerous programmes that overlapped and competed. Commissioners observed and sometimes regretted this development of badly coordinated ministerial impulses and the profusion of calls for projects, some of which involved contradictory orders. They reported the fatigue experienced by territorial authorities and association actors. As centrifugal approaches began gaining ground, the SNPLP no longer represented a decision-making body with integrated leadership: from this point, it only served as a tracking support and, at best, a support for aligning the scattered initiatives that once again began to accumulate. Initially a transformative instrument working on behalf of a State seeking modernization, the SNPLP had become the management framework of a State returning to a function of adjustment (Epstein 2000).

### **2.3 Rather erratic territorial implementation**

The implementation of the SNPLP and its territorial governance (Pasquier *et al.* 2013) turned out to be rather erratic insofar as, while putting forward an ambition for innovation or even breakthrough, it had to deal with former, well-established arrangements and public action territorial setups that were ‘already there’.

In the social domain, the regionalization of poverty action corresponded to the initial ambition to develop and structure a new strategic space capable of circumventing traditional regulations – in particular between decentralized state services and *département* councils – with an inefficient track record of driving peIS-related ambitions. Yet rapidly this intention to circumvent was thwarted by an under-estimation of social jurisdictions decentralized at *département* level; the presidential intention to pursue more marked departmentalization of public action following the yellow vest crisis; and the ministry of the interior’s ambition to implement *département*-level agreements (Marty, Paux 2021). In an atmosphere of constant tensions between the executive and territorial authorities, the DIPLP finally established a governance model on two levels: territorial strategy would be established and coordinated at regional level via the Commissioners, working groups, and a collaborative platform, while contracts and budget management would be done at *département* level. Although relatively quick to implement, this institutional design tended to renew and extend the former arrangements between Prefects and the Presidents of *département* councils.

Unlike the former generation of contracts, current public action contracts are characterized by the fact that the approach proposed by the State is generally expressed less openly. The State, instead of acting as a coordinator, proposing that local protagonists work together in a shared diagnosis framework and support certain specific local strategies, acts rather to incentivize *départements* to finance and implement five key measures. However, in reality, this ‘remote government’ (Epstein, 2013) remains relative: the key measures are broken down in a fairly specific manner depending on the territory. In addition, in each contract with the *départements*, a second part recycles and supports a wide range of measures implemented by local initiatives. This place left to the good will of local authorities is reinforced by the fact that recent contracts signed with the regions and cities are not subject to any specific management by the State. Lastly, despite the ambitions put forward and in the view of all protagonists, the establishment of indicator-based management and evaluation remains extremely tenuous and does not lead to a convergence, even less to a homogenization, of initiatives taken locally in the name of the SNPLP.

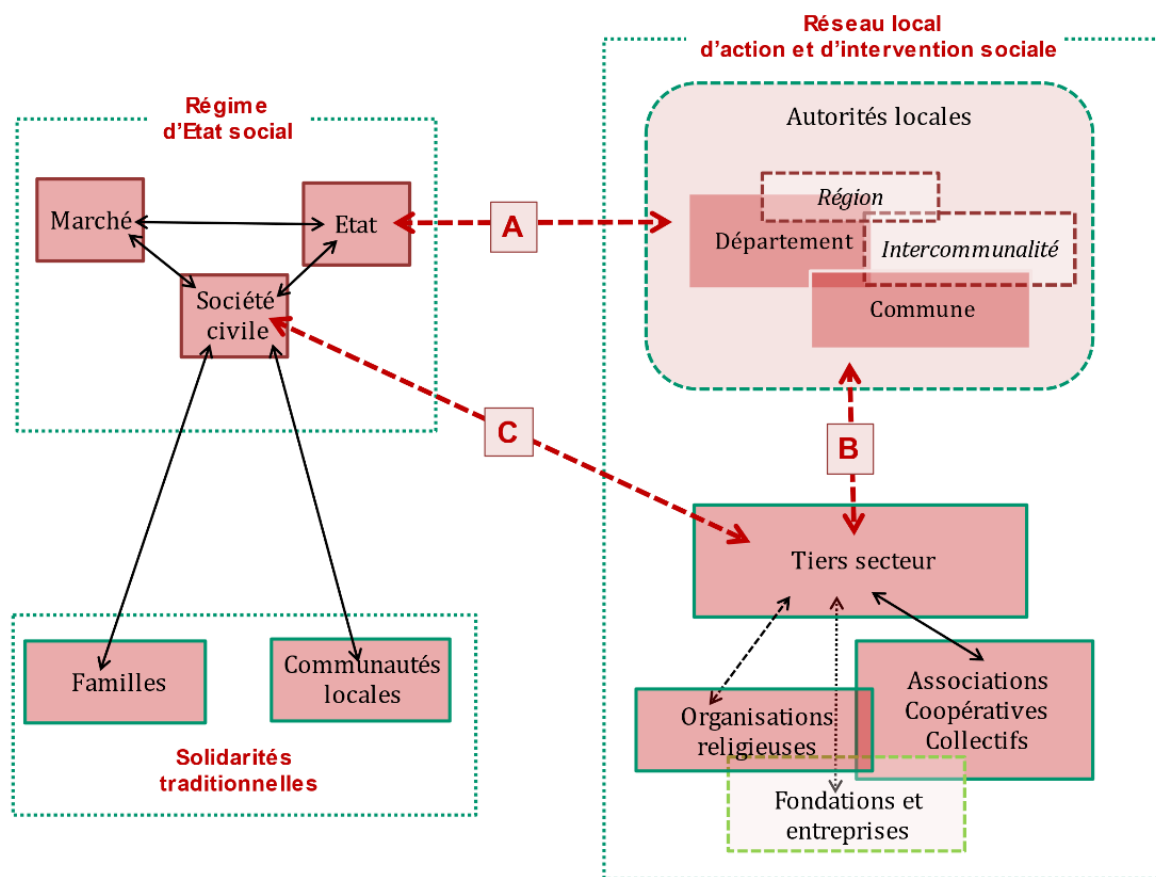
Thus, it primarily appears to be a differentiation process featuring highly unequal territorial setups in terms of local management capacity on social issues. Put simply, three main types of setup exist:

- Fragmented setups (regions of Ile de France and Occitanie) and/or with little political capacity, and more or less deficient local actors (Martinique), fairly inactive local authorities and a State that has difficulties implementing its role, even though it is encouraged to be assertive and sometimes even directly interventionist.
- Intermediate setups on the way to institutionalization with mobilized local actors, local authorities that are involved (Nord *département*, Dijon Métropole, Toulouse Métropole) but that experience problems with resources and a State solicited to provide active support, or even to play a role of co-producer and co-leader.
- Stabilized setups with more autonomous political capacity (Brittany region, Hautes Pyrénées *département*, Rennes Métropole), corresponding to anti-poverty territorial systems for the long term that aim to use resources proposed by the State, while keeping it at a distance.

Depending on more or less deteriorated social-territorial situations and the local historicity of collective action dynamics (Pasquier 2012), this impact of existing networks and unequal distribution of political capacities act to produce a fragmentation of public action.

#### **2.4. Integration/differentiation and cohesion/fragmentation**

At this point, based on the initial work of Marco Oberti (2000), we can propose a modelling of the mechanisms of integration and differentiation (A and C), and cohesion and fragmentation (B) present in public action on solidarity.



**Figure 4: Modelling of multi-level governance in the solidarity field**

(ARENES team, 2021 after Oberti, 2000)

#### Legend

**A:** Governmental framework versus local political autonomy.

**B:** Nature and intensity of contributions between local authorities and the third sector within the local social action network.

**C:** Level of influence, within civil society, of established national organizations (federations, large groups, foundations, etc.) on territorial actors (companies, associations and local foundations).

#### Lines of analysis

*The degree of integration or differentiation between a social action regime and a local system depends on A and C.*

*The degree of cohesion or fragmentation within the local social action network depends on B.*

In the face of what is often perceived as a very wide range of actors and measures involved in solidarity governance, this model puts the accent on three key dimensions: the persistence of traditional forms of solidarity, related to family, the community, or affinities; the national social action regime historically organized around rights solidarities and now oriented towards a form of active social State; and the diversity of local social action and social intervention networks. The modelling also draws attention to the possible interactions between these three types. Shown by the A, B and C arrows on the graph above, these interactions concern:

- The relations between national authorities and local authorities: in the case of the SNPLP, we have seen that these relations are largely organized by bilateral contract mechanisms (A).
- Relations between local authorities and organizations that, in the third sector, act at local level (B).

- The relations, within civil society, between federative national organizations and local initiatives (C).

Broadly speaking, we can say that in a regime featuring an accumulation of social policies, this multi-level governance of poverty action is more or less conducive to the integration or differentiation of initiatives depending on the relations forged between national and local authorities (A), but also depending on those that, within civil society and the third sector, connect national dynamics and local initiatives (C).

In this area, the SNPLP was initially subject to governmental framing, but went on to generate fairly strong local autonomy in terms of measures initiated by the *départements* and thanks to the fact that the agreements drawn up with cities and regions remained very open. Concerning associations, the initial impetus related to innovation and to peIS tended to play into the hands of a multitude of social action outsiders that were positioned on the territories and not part of national charity movements. Yet, having benefited from the ‘cohesion’ part of the French recovery plan, the latter have successfully returned to take centre stage.

As to the relations at play within local social action networks (B), we have observed that, depending on the territory, they are highly diverse and vacillate between cohesion and fragmentation. They are related to historicity and ‘spirit of place’. They therefore depend on the extent to which public powers are mobilized on the social question in general, and that of combating poverty in particular, and the more or less partnership-based relations maintained on this subject between the different levels of territorial authority. They also concern the levels of support and the amount of influence that local authorities wield in the association sector, along with the importance acquired by association partnerships.

## Conclusion

This analysis of the SNPLP therefore highlights the complexity of intersectoral, inter-organizational and multi-level mechanisms involved in putting together public policy. Following initial strong political leadership, and equipped with a transformative ideational and strategic framework, the strategy was obliged to scale down its initial ambitions as a result of crises, changes in the political agenda, and even more so, the difficulty of shifting the sectoral and inter-institutional anchoring of French social policies. While changes were generated, their durability and scope are questionable in terms of the dependence of social action sectors and sub-sectors on the institutional pathway (Bonoli, Palier, 1999). The ‘institutionalized DIY’ revealed by the implementation of the SNPLP is made concrete through learning, yet it appears to have acted more to boost the poverty action strategies of already ‘efficient’ local systems. Ultimately, faced with an accumulation of social policies and the dissemination of social objectives in numerous areas of public action, the potentially integrating character of a coordinated poverty action policy remains to be seen.

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