A Diversified Strategy to Modernize a Public Service by Associating Users: the case of the CAF (Family Allowances Organization) Yvelines (Ile-de-France).

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Abstract

The 101 CAF (Family Allowances Organizations – Caisses d’Allocations Familiales) correspond to one of the four parts (Family) of the French National Social Security (Sécurité Sociale) created in 1945. These CAF constitute a network managed by the CNAF (Caisse Nationale d’Allocations Familiales). The different CAF have some possibility of local experiments, particularly in their relations with their users.

We first discuss the different words employed for people using their services: “users” (usagers), “recipients” (allocataires), “consumers” (clients). We prefer “citizens” (citoyens) or users-citizens in a co-production of services perspective of “daily innovation”.

We will analyze the decisive choice of the Yvelines CAF (Ile-de-France Region) to maintain a “multichannel” approach for reception of users: physical (appointment in desks), telephone and internet via the platform “caf.fr” outlining the cooperations with local associations and proximity organizations to develop the involvement of “users-citizens”.

Résumé

Les 101 Caisses d’Allocations Familiales (CAF) constituent une des 4 branches (Famille) de la Sécurité sociale française fondée en 1945. Ces différentes CAF ont un fonctionnement en réseau, géré par la CNAF (Caisse Nationale d’Allocations Familiales). Les différentes CAF ont des possibilités de mener des expériences locales, en particulier dans leurs relations avec leurs usagers.

Nous discuterons tout d’abord les différents termes utilisés pour désigner les bénéficiaires de leurs services : « usagers », « allocataires », « clients ». Nous préférons celui de « citoyen » ou d’ « usager-citoyen », dans une perspective de coproduction de services d’ « innovation au quotidien ».

Nous analyserons le choix décisif de la CAF des Yvelines (Région Ile-de-France) pour maintenir une approche « multicanaux » pour l’accueil des usagers : physique (accueil dans des bureaux), téléphone et internet via la
The National Family Allowance Organization (Caisse Nationale des Allocations Familiales - CNAF) is one of the four different organizations constituting the French Social Security System (Sécurité Sociale) founded in 1945. Its role for “social cohesion” is very important, especially in a period of economic crisis since 2008 and of crisis of the “social link” (Paugam).

The ability of innovation of this key sector is globally misunderstood (Laville). After studying the main evolutions of the CNAF and its goals, we present the specificity of this work and particularly the position of the University’s researcher of this paper. Then we will analyze recent developments in one of its local branches, Yvelines CAF in Ile-de-France Region (around Paris).

This work in progress corresponds to the first step of an evolution analysis of a local public service over time involving "citizens" in a co-production of services approach in the way proposed by P. Rosanvallon to try to "rethink the Welfare State", with all the specificity of services activities, particularly in the healthcare, welfare and social activities (Djellal - Gallouj).

2. Researcher’s Position and Methodology: Complementary Views to Analyze a Services Proximity Organization in a Critical Period of Transition

This work corresponds to the cooperation of a University’s Professor with members of the Management Team of Yvelines CAF, heavily involved in the organizational changes resulting in an important way from the implementation of the services platform caf.fr.

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1 The other organizations are the National Organization for Sick Insurance or in French Caisse Nationale d'Assurance Maladie des Travailleurs Salariés (CNAMTS) to finance and contribute to manage the Healthcare System, the National Organization for Pension Insurance or Caisse Nationale d'Assurance Vieillesse ou CNAF et l’ACOSS (URSSAF Network) to collect the contributions from organizations or companies and those from employees financing the whole French Social Security System. All these organizations pilot national networks of local organizations.
This complementarity of sights is essential for analyzing the trends developed in recent years in a public service modernization approach (Laville). We position in a dual perspective of “innovation in the territories” (Godet and al.) and of “daily organizational innovations” (Alter).

We have worked in a perspective of action research (Meyer). Within the French academic discipline of Information and Communication Sciences, we position in the approach proposed by F. Bernard, based on the convergence of four issues: link (relationship, interactions), meaning, knowledge, for action.

It corresponds to researcher’s observations (with interviews of managers or users), analysis of documents (paper or digital) and Internet devices to help the CAF management team to better consider current trends and anticipate innovative ways in interaction with expectations (or needs) of citizens-users.

The position of the University Paris-East researcher has progressively changed in the recent years. At the beginning we have rather an “observation” and analyzing position. Finally in interaction with another works in the “Social and Solidary Economics” (Economie Sociale et Solidaire), particularly in training for unemployed young people to help them to develop their own economic activity, we progressively come to the research posture described by F. Bernard and al. as "engaging communication". They outline the dimensions of "engaging or committed position" and that of projects. This individual position also corresponds to a main objective of the CNAF: “improving the insertion pathway of people and families in precarious situation” (COG, p. 11).

3. CNAF, a part of the French National Social Security System

Social Security has been created in France by government order of October 4, 1945. It was "designed to ensure workers and their families against risks of any kind of problem that may reduce or eliminate their earning capacity, to cover costs of maternity and family expenses they incur” ².

This last mission, expanded in 1978 to all families with dependent children, is fundamental to the future and to favor social cohesion. Family branch of the Social Security contributes decisively to this goal. On December 2015 31th, it covered nearly 31.1 million people (adults and children), enjoying at least a benefit paid by the welfare offices in metropolitan France and overseas departments (DOM: Départements et Territoires d’Outremer). A total of 47% of the French population (on 66 million), distributed in 11.8 million homes is covered by the benefits of CAF and received last year more than 70 billion euros direct benefits ³.

² In French : « destinée à garantir les travailleurs et leurs familles contre les risques de toute nature susceptibles de réduire ou de supprimer leur capacité de gain, à couvrir les charges de maternité et les charges de famille qu’ils supportent ».

Family branch of the French Social Security has a networked management, the various local offices (101) being driven by the National Family Allowances Fund (CNAF).

In a contractual way, in a MAP (Public Action Modernization – *Modernisation de l’Action Publique* - approach, since twenty years, the State and the various Social Security funds conclude Objectives and Conventions Management or COG (*Conventions d’Objectifs de Gestion*). A COG was thus concluded for five years (2013 - 2017) between the CNAF and the State (under the double signature of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health and the Ministry of Economy and Finance). The CNAF and the State have mutually committed around strong ambitions to services of family policy. "They intend to make the COG more than just a management tool, a real public policy tool that translates voluntarism and priorities of family policy shared by the government and the board of the CNAF 4."

The COG has three major ambitions: "The proactive development of services to families, the implementation of a service policy to recipients adapted to the crisis and the changing needs of families, the requirement for improving the efficiency of the production process (producing better), associating administrators of the CAF, executive teams, agents and users. " Improving services dimension to users is clearly outlined, such as commitment to innovation by combining the two sides in a perspective of efficiency and performance in a context of economic crisis and budgetary constraints unavoidable. The major role of family policy, like all social security schemes for social cohesion and the maintenance of "social bond" (Paugam) is strongly reaffirmed. Also with the desire to involve "users" to change and decision-making process (pp. 1 - 3) in a service offering policy enshrined in the territories (p. 7).

These goals represent a broad and dynamic vision of family policy with ambitions as "Improving the insertion pathway of people and families in precarious position" or "foster family housing conditions and living environment quality" and " help families facing events or difficulties undermining family life "(COG, pp. 11-12).

The local CAF also pay the RSA (Solidarity Social Payment (*Revenu de Solidarité Active*), which replaced the Minimum Income Support (or RMI – *Revenu Minimum d’Insertion* created in 1988) and the single parent allowance (API – *Allocation de Parent Isolé*) since June 2009. The RSA is paid to the unemployed and workers who have few resources. It ensures a minimum income (RSA base) but also a complement to a small salary (RSA activity) to encourage the recovery or increase of a professional activity. Since February 2016, the RSA Activity has been replaced by the Activity Prime (*Prime d’Activité*). Family Allowances have so paid this Activity Prime to nearly 1.5 million recipients of RSA. Over 2.3 million homes, representing over 3.8 million people have already benefited, including 400 000 young people from

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18 to 24 years, of this Activity Prime. Other social security funds as Mutualité Sociale Agricole (MSA) are also involved.

The CAF also conduct targeted actions on specific audiences. In this way, on June 2016 a specific campaign was opened for student housing, using social networks. The dissemination of a national video chat on the Youtube channel "Family Allowances" corresponded to its beginning.

"A communication policy to support the implementation of the goals of the COG " including the establishment of a master plan of communication to accompany the evolution of the industry and promoting its global services offer is clearly displayed as a key to success (COG, p. 27) with the use of social networks and digital technologies to better engage users.

The goals and the commitments of the national COG are then explained separately between the 4 National Social Security Funds and their various local offices, in our case, the Family Allowance Fund of Yvelines.

4. A Real Innovation Capacity, especially in Relations with Users

Yvelines CAF is one of the 101 local offices (with 620 employees for 217,594 users) of the National CNAF. The local CAF have some autonomy to implement social and organizational innovations. The Yvelines CAF work on a specific departement of Ile-de-France region created in 1967 (Yvelines), both urban and rural. Its population is very contrasted: Mantes-la-Jolie or Trappes for example are sensitive areas, Saint-Germain-en-Laye, Versailles or Rambouillet rather wealthy and residential towns. The headquarters of the Yvelines CAF are located in the new town of Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines, regrouping new suburbs and more ancient towns.

This paper associates a University’s professor and members of the management team of CAF Yvelines, particularly involved in the recent organizational changes resulting from the implementation of the platform caf.fr services. This complementarity of sights is particularly important to analyze the main trends developed in recent years in public service modernization perspective (Laville), and also as already mentioned above in a dual perspective of innovation in the territories (Godet et al.) and of every day organizational innovation or innovation au quotidien (Alter).

The ability of innovation of this key sector for the social cohesion as an essential part of Social and Solidary Economy is globally misunderstood (Laville) and so constitutes an interesting field of action research especially in a coproduction services with users-citizens perspective.

As points The Godet – Durance – Mousli report, "technology is important, but it is not essential." The authors point out that only 20% of innovations have technical origin and 80% social one (2010, p. 21). We place in this perspective, which also often meets the prospects of "daily innovation" according to N. Alter.

We also outline the importance of socio-technical new digital devices and especially platforms as new intermediation devices such as caf.fr both to give information to
users but also to develop new services in interaction with them. For M. Doueihi, these platforms are essential, « not because they control access and storage, but because they have become through the activities of the users, places of convergence between information, communication, knowledge and sociability” (2011, p. 17).5

This role of platforms is important in the policy of the CNAF to develop new relations with users in our perspective of services coproduction (caf.fr).


The approaches of public relations and public service missions have evolved. In the lengthy document explaining the COG 2013 - 2017, CNAF often uses the traditional term of “user” (in French, usager), using also very often that of “beneficiary” or “recipient” (in French, bénéficiaire).

Both terms have been gradually supplanted in other Social Security funds as CNAMTS (Sick Insurance – Assurance Maladie), by “customer (“client”) in relation to the development of quality approaches. The terms of users and beneficiaries seem a bit too passive, corresponding to only receiving benefits, customer term can induce a strictly financial and commercial side in relation to a market and competition between agencies that is not the case in the French Social Security.

Furthermore the “customer” term is overused and can generate some debate as it has been underlined by the sociologist G. Jeannot (2010) in the scientific journal sponsored by the CNAF (Informations Sociales).

G. Jeannot stresses that with the opening up to competition of the major companies of the French public sector (EDF, SNCF, France Telecom, La Poste, etc.), the “users” (“usagers”) have become “customers” (“clients”). But have they gained with the change? For him, “nothing is less sure ... Freedom of choice greatly awaited is only apparent ... guaranteed quality of service and customer care are neglected.”6

He highlights the evolution of the term “user” since the Middle Ages, where it corresponded to community practices, user being a quasi “usufructuary”. This old word was used in the early twentieth century by considering the user as a quasi shareholder of the public service. After 1950, the term was gradually devalued, the “user” receiving only a standard service for better and for worse. It is before this devaluation of the term “user” that has developed the use of the term of “customer” or “client”. G. Jeannot emphasizes that “the choice of being customer is not the choice of the customer.” He stresses the risk of generalization of an economy of “low cost”.

5 In French : « non pas parce qu’elles gèrent l’accès et le stockage, mais parce qu’elles sont devenues grâce aux activités des usagers, des lieux de convergence entre information, communication, savoir et sociabilité » (2011, p. 17).

6 In French, “avec l’ouverture à la concurrence des grandes entreprises du service public (EDF, SNCF, France Telecom, La Poste, etc.), les “usagers” sont devenus des “clients”. Mais ont-ils gagné au change ? Pour lui, “rien n’est moins sûr ... La liberté de choix tant attendue n’est qu’apparente ...la garantie de la qualité du service et le soin du client sont délaissés”.
In the recent years, with the risks of privatization and change of employees status change with increased casualization, some speak of the risk of "uberisation".

For making a strong impression, G. Jeannot parodies the title of a book of A. Ehrenberg (The fatigue of being oneself or La fatigue d’être soi, 1998). The depressed feeling is never far from the requirement of widespread performance which has developed in our ultra-productive society.

In a perspective of responsibility in a coproduction of services perspective, we prefer to speak of "citizen-consumer".


The Yvelines CAF has done the decisive choice to maintain a multichannel strategy for reception of users: physical (appointment in desks), paper (possibility to write directly to the CAF), telephone (call center) and internet via the platform caf.fr. In the main changes experienced in recent years, Yvelines CAF favors some aspects: changes in the pattern of interactions with the public emergence of new intermediation ways, etc. This policy is explained in a lot of Yvelines CAF documents: specific leaflets or annual documents of activity.

We insist on the originality of this strategy based on the development of partnerships for digital facilitation (associations, local authorities, local missions or missions locales, etc.).

At the physical host level (reception), the main effort between 2013 and 2015 focused on the main change corresponds to a reception when people come (flow management or gestion de flux) to a welcome by appointments. The telephone service provides immediate responses or proposes specific appointments. Appointments are divided into two different levels or even three regarding the different cases of people concerned. A first level of 10 min with answers to users and scanning the situation and updating the file of the user via file caf.fr. A second level of 20 mn allows more complex answers and appointments more specialized in particular to clarify the rights. A third type of appointment is possible with social workers for specific situations, especially of precariousness.

The objective is to make converging more services to caf.fr platform. So multimedia spaces have been set up with new and efficient equipments available for the citizens-users, with the possibility of accompanying by agents specifically trained, which corresponds to a new job, this aspect of creation of new intermediation jobs with users becoming more involved actors may be particularly stressed.

This strategy has been developed in recent years in various local sites (10).

7 www.caf.fr
The effort is particularly located on the development of the platform caf.fr services and therefore to exchanges and digital records and try to better link to it other types of physical reception and mail papers. Today caf.fr platform allows the users of recipients to monitor their files, get their statement of benefits, estimate, request a service, report changes of location or coordinates declare its resources, make appointments, pay back debt, get information on benefits, aid and topicality of the Yvelines CAF.

In a spirit of continuous process of improvement of services to users, a special effort is done to the support of partners and beneficiaries to the digital or dematerialized uses (via caf.fr platform) including the development of digital workshops digital, labeling CAF partners (associations, local authorities, local missions, etc.) in relay points and with information booklets for services tailored to the different needs of users. It should be mentioned their diversity, with more or less sensitive sites with more or less difficult publics: for example reception in Mantes-la-Jolie and types of received public are different from those of Versailles, Rambouillet and Saint-Germain-in Laye.

At December 31 2015, 83,355 distinct recipients or users (about 217,594) have logged at least once on the caf.fr site, with a total of 326,019 connections (25,516 for benefit applications, 148,362 for resource statements 99 925 to changes in circumstances, 52,216 for other procedures online), an increase of 35.6% (the target set by the CNAF being 20% increase in 2015).

We are in this approach to enhance the role of "citizen-users" in a perspective of commitment for a co-production of local services especially around new uses of ICT. But it is above all to meet the best and with the existing means with very different expectations of very different audiences depending on the site: youth connected with their smartphones as immigrant populations in precarious situations who sometimes need a translator (problem for understanding the foreign languages) in a physical host. With the challenge of managing queues or time spent waiting a telephone response compared to a call center. The objectives of improving these services are essential in different COG and are quantified.

These changes in the manners for interactions with the public favor the emergence of new intermediation jobs, which constitutes a new field for future action researches.

The clearly stated goal, particularly with the use of ICT is to develop autonomy and public accountability (with a major training effort based on partner organizations), we favor as mentioned above the term "citizen ", valued by Strobel as soon as 1994, speaking of the" modernization by the user ", essential in a co-production of services perspective. Some users yearn for more autonomy in their actions, and to be less dependent on schedules and sites of reception.

The public training dimension is essential. CAF Yvelines seeks to expand this based on local associations. As in the health sector with the concept of "expert patient" (or patient expert), it is to develop and train "relay citizens" (or citoyens relais) who serve as intermediaries with other users-citizens.
7. Conclusion

The crisis has worsened since 2008 is not only that of ultra competition and financial obsession of the economy, it is also that of the "social bond" or "lien social" (Paugam) and solidarity.

In this cooperation with the direction team of Yvelines CAF and above all in other cooperation for creating new economic activities for young people, the position of the Paris-East researcher has changed becoming that of "committed researcher", taken for us all its meaning and corresponding to a new personal approach to the RSU or Social Responsibility of the Universities, revisited as "social responsibility of the researcher." Having gradually become convinced that the future can be built from micro actions on the territory and on daily innovative practices: improving services to users by involving them more with the development of new intermediation jobs.

This paper is the first step of the evolution analysis work of a local public service over time (the "Branch family" of French Social Security System) in a view of modernization, involving autonomous "citizens" from the perspective traced several years ago by P. Rosanvallon to "rethink the Welfare State" and rediscover solidarity in a context of "Social and Solidary Economy."

For the Social Security Organizations and in particular the CAF, it also corresponds to new service organizations positioning changing between 'market and solidarity" (Laville, 2010). In this way, we share the G. Jeannot fears on changes to services "low cost" and widespread competition from French public companies (EDF, SNCF, La Poste, France Telecom ...). Where this logic of open competition will finish? In this sense, the Welfare organizations and wider social sectors will correspond to the "new frontier" of opening to competition? For G. Jeannot, the logic of opening these services to competition follows a progressive logic that now seems inexorable. The principle of competition in the Treaty of Rome originally was subject to exceptions for certain services. Will they continue in the future?

The French model of social protection was increasingly isolated in a European Union won by the Anglo-Saxon neo-liberalism. Will the British Brexit largely corresponding to the fears for the future and the reject of European bureaucracy permit awareness in Europe of the need for "social bond" and of the limits of the only model of the market?

We inscribe resolutely in a radically different perspective, which is that to give full meaning to solidarity and rebuild the Welfare state, of course with efficiency and performance requirements in a context of increasing budgetary constraints. This is to bet on the ambivalent potential of ICT: they both present the risk of more constraints and controls, but they can be also present tremendous potential for autonomy and interactions (citizen’s empowerment).

It is also ultimately articulate the notion of "resilience" (capacity of reaction in a difficult situation) at individual and collective levels with that of "reliance" (link, relationship, interaction) to help to the "sustainable development" of territories or to "meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations
to meet their own needs "(Brundtland report, 1987). For S. Bertezene evoking this issue in the Health sector as a major sector of Welfare Social protection, "the long-term vision is most ... in the one hand, we must be attentive to the impact of operations on the environment, particularly on resources present and future; and, secondly, we must consider the impact of activities on future generations to leave them an environmental asset, socially and economically to ensure them a better life."

The action of the CAF, particularly that of Yvelines, lies completely in this perspective, in the footsteps shown by the COG goals. It remains to continue to associate the best possible the user-citizens in an innovative coproduction of services perspective.

8. References


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9 In French, « répondre aux besoins du présent sans compromettre la capacité des générations futures de répondre aux leurs » (rapport Brundtland, 1987).

10 In French, « la vision du long terme est majeure ... d’une part, il faut être attentif aux impacts des activités sur l’environnement, en particulier sur les ressources présentes et à venir ; et, d’autre part, nous devons considérer les impacts des activités sur les générations futures afin de leur léguer un actif environnemental, social et économique pour leur assurer une vie meilleure ». 


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