

Mobility channels: An instrument for analysing and regulating the local labour market

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Restructuring and the labour market

All the developed countries are currently engaged in a process of reconverting their production systems but it is in the industrial regions that the redeployment needs are greatest since these are the areas in which the largest numbers of jobs have been lost. This has resulted in the regional labour market being thrown out of kilter and its power of attraction being weakened. Thus, the problem of employment at the regional level is not merely a question of volume but also of how the labour market functions and whether it attracts or repels undertakings and manpower.

As the basis for our investigation of these questions we chose a region where the restructuring process is in full swing, namely the Neuchâtel region of Switzerland, or more precisely the labour catchment area surrounding that city. In 1975 this area provided employment for 36,850 persons (1.5 per cent of the national total) spread over 4,200 establishments. The area is characterised by a large proportion of secondary sector jobs, 53 per cent compared with 48 per cent for Switzerland as a whole. In addition, its main manufactures are watches and machine tools, two of the branches hardest hit by the introduction of electronics. As a result of this, the number of jobs has declined by 7 per cent over the past ten years.

The new technology (electronics) necessitates a complete overhaul of the regional production machinery, which will only be possible if the labour market retains sufficient power of attraction to keep hold of manpower with the necessary skills and abilities.

Employment is the determining factor in an individual's integration into a regional community. It is in the region where they live that people come face to face with problems and seek solutions. It is important therefore to

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identify the local significance of labour market problems. However, not all regions offer the same opportunities. In the industrial regions in particular, the production systems have been thrown into disarray, resulting in major disturbances in the functioning of the local employment system. Under these circumstances, undertakings alter their method of manpower administration, their internal labour markets may cease to match their needs, and promotion or mobility channels are blocked, thus giving the workers a sense of insecurity. For example, when an undertaking reorganises its internal market jobs which used to be stable become precarious, and workers who were once indispensable find they are no longer so. This sets up chain reactions producing insecurity and instability. Paradoxically, lay-offs in some undertakings create recruitment difficulties for others. The closure of some undertakings does not necessarily increase the supply of manpower but can on the contrary endanger the continued existence and efficiency of other establishments.

Production systems and employment systems are closely inter-related in this process and difficulties in the one can be sufficient to create difficulties for the other.

Under the circumstances, the question arises of how a regional labour market structure can continue to exercise a power of attraction. Accordingly, before we can suggest a suitable regional policy what we have to do is to analyse the ways in which the various categories of jobs in a region evolve and change and how they are intertwined and complement one another.

Characteristics of a local employment structure

A local structure can be characterised in several complementary ways:

- *A particular manpower structure.* The manpower structure of each area presents particular features (skills, distribution by sex, origin and age of workers, etc.) which make it possible to determine the types of employment that are viable there.
- *Degree of employment stability.* The number of jobs created or lost varies from case to case. Such changes determine to a large extent the degree of manpower mobility.
- *Particularly stable/mobile positions.* The type of jobs offered in the region determines the possibilities of stable employment or the need for mobility. Thus, managerial personnel are generally more stable than unskilled workers, older workers than the young, nationals than foreigners, and men than women.
- *Employment situations that vary during a person's working life.* Generally speaking, workers are more mobile at the start of their working life than at the end. There are accordingly initial posts (training, first jobs) and final jobs (stable).
- *Greater or lesser promotion prospects.* Occupational advancement can be the result of various processes: internal training and promotion

within an undertaking; on-the-job training of unskilled workers and gradual progress upwards; or professional experience acquired in a number of successive jobs with subsequent improvement in status. These are all cases of vertical mobility. Where promotion is not involved, we speak of lateral mobility. These various career prospects depend on the workers being offered jobs in which they can acquire skills or turn them to good account.

Thus the local labour market structure is determined by jobs that are differentiated as to content, stability, the role they play in the career of individuals and the characteristics of the persons holding them. In this structure, individuals are assigned to the various jobs according to certain rules and, consequently, the functioning of the labour market depends on the manner in which their assignment is organised. These assignment procedures, which we term “mobility channels”, give rise to flows of manpower between the different categories of jobs.

The nature of mobility channels

Mobility channels form linkages between jobs: a given job only leads to a limited number of others. Segmentation of the market can thus be identified with the workers’ positioning on a mobility channel.

The concept of mobility channels introduces a number of factors which can be summarised as follows:

- the way the labour market functions is revealed most clearly in the flows of manpower between jobs;
- the flows are not random but follow a fairly regular sequence;
- the sequence of the flows reveals in fact the structure of the market or its segmentation;
- inasmuch as it is the undertakings that determine the volume, characteristics and content of the jobs offered, evaluation of the “jobs” factor means that the undertakings have to be given prime importance in our analysis.

What we are trying to say is that, as another author puts it, “some jobs are skilled and enable those holding them to improve their skills. They set in train a process of accumulation of vocational skills. Other jobs are unskilled and, as such, offer those doing them no opportunity of acquiring any real qualifications. The difference lies in whether or not there is channel for occupational advancement.”¹ In this context each job fulfils a function: it can provide stability, it can act as a springboard, or it can offer flexibility. Finally, some jobs occupy no particular position in the overall organisation of the market.

Mobility channels are therefore composed of various phases or “staging posts”, which correspond to well-defined types of establishments.

The role of the establishments

Not all establishments offer the same types of jobs. Some specialise in recruiting young people whom they train and offer advancement prospects; others train workers who will leave at the end of their apprenticeship; yet others only hire workers with professional experience, and some recruit unskilled workers, whatever their age, experience, etc. There are obviously also establishments which offer several types of jobs.

In short, a local labour market structure is determined by the types of establishments operating in that area. Mobility between the different types we have identified is not a random process. Workers move, for example, from training and first-job establishments to those where they finally settle and which recruit workers with experience or of a certain age, possibly taking in less typical establishments on the way. Identification of the type of establishment makes it possible therefore to obtain a fairly clear picture of the way the labour market functions at the local level and to gauge the consequences of any modification in that structure. For example, the closure of final establishments, or simply the fact that the conditions they offer are becoming less attractive, can be enough to threaten recruitment for other undertakings since some workers, disappointed by the advancement prospects they see the region as offering, move away at the very start of their working life to seek jobs elsewhere. Conversely, the shortage of apprenticeships, and even more of jobs for beginners, can subsequently make recruitment of experienced workers very difficult for other establishments. At the regional level there are therefore differentiated labour market structures, which explain their varying powers of attraction.

Identification of the mobility channels

In order to understand how the labour market functions it is necessary therefore to identify the different mobility channels. In order to do so, we proceeded in two stages. First of all we worked out a typology of the jobs offered by the establishments and then a typology of the establishments in order to clarify the different functions they perform on the labour market. Bearing in mind the type of jobs offered, the establishments occupy well-defined staging posts along the various mobility channels.

Once they have begun their working life people can follow a wide variety of paths: they can seek advancement in the same undertaking (where there is an internal market); they can occupy a series of jobs in which they improve their qualifications and thus their chances of finding a stable job that suits them; they can stay in the first job they find; they can take up a number of precarious, temporary jobs for short periods of time; or, once they have acquired a certain amount of experience, they can find for themselves a stable job (second jobs, with or without promotion prospects).

Once in a stable job most people continue to work until they retire or withdraw voluntarily from occupational activity (women for the most part).

To simplify, we can distinguish three main types of mobility channels:

- *Vertical mobility channels.* Individuals can enter an undertaking and make a career therein, or they can occupy a series of jobs in different undertakings with a view to acquiring experience or, more generally, skills that are negotiable on the market and that enable them eventually to find jobs that are highly attractive in terms of content, pay, security, etc.
- *Lateral mobility channels.* People occupy a series of posts without being able to improve their position on the market to any notable degree.
- *Entry/exit flows.* The lack of opportunity or motivation to change jobs reduces mobility to a single entry into and exit from working life. The length of time the post is occupied can vary from a few days to several years.

The various types of jobs can then be characterised according to their function on the market, or in other words according to their position on the various mobility channels.

It was with this in mind that we developed the following typology of jobs.

Typology of jobs

Our investigations in the Neuchâtel region² led us to define ten categories of jobs classified according to their position on the structural axis “internal market (stability) – external market (mobility)”. A few examples should help to explain this typology better:

- (1) *Jobs offering promotion prospects* (11 per cent): these are held by workers following one or more internal promotions.
- (2) *Initial posts in the internal market, including training positions to meet the undertaking’s needs* (5 per cent): these are offered to workers engaged to follow a career channel in the internal market. If workers change jobs it is to occupy positions offering promotion prospects.
- (3) *Stable final jobs offering promotion prospects* (9 per cent): these are designed for experienced workers wishing to settle down and who are suitable material for promotion within the undertaking.
- (4) *Stable final jobs without promotion prospects* (25 per cent): these are offered to experienced workers to fill a given post.
- (5) *Regular (steady) or horizontally stable jobs* (13 per cent): these are held throughout their working life by persons who remain at the same level in the hierarchy.
- (6) *Jobs with vertical mobility* (5 per cent): these are occupied for a limited period (generally two to five years) by workers wishing to acquire an

additional qualification that is negotiable on the market and will lead, when they next change jobs, to a notable improvement in their situation.

- (7) *Initial jobs and training posts for the external market* (8 per cent): initial jobs are designed to give young skilled workers their first practical experience in working life; training posts are designed to provide basic training for unskilled workers.
- (8) *Jobs with lateral mobility* (14 per cent): these jobs do not call for any great degree of skill and are characterised by frequent turnover. They are held for a relatively short period by workers moving from one undertaking to another without any real improvement in their situation.
- (9) *Precarious jobs tied to the labour market* (3 per cent): this category covers jobs which are held temporarily by workers who then have to look for another job. The precariousness of these positions may be due either to stringent selection during the probationary period or to the temporary nature of the contracts (hired-out workers or unemployed persons engaged for a limited period).
- (10) *Precarious jobs not tied to the labour market* (8 per cent): these are held by persons who accept the precariousness of the job either because it is their only way of finding work (seasonal, foreign or women workers in rural areas), or because they find the advantages offered (in terms of work schedules, location, etc.) suit them particularly well (women auxiliaries, students and homeworkers, in particular). If these people give up or lose their jobs it generally means that they leave the labour market. There is a relationship, therefore, between this category of jobs and the latent manpower reserve.

Typology of establishments

Identification of the scale and importance of the various jobs offered enables us to determine the structure of the labour market and the way it functions in a given region. However, jobs are not independent units since a combination of them can be found in every establishment. Because of this we decided to move on from the typology of jobs to work out the typology of establishments. The groupings consist of establishments occupying the same position on the various mobility channels, i.e. offering the same combinations of jobs.

All things considered, identification of the mobility channels requires an analysis of the types of jobs offered by the establishments. It is obvious that not all types are found in every region. The existence or absence of this or that type in a given region enables us to determine the region's power of attraction.

As the diagram shows, we ended up with 13 types of establishments:

- (1) IQH: first-job establishments offering promotion prospects for qualified personnel (Q) (internal market (I) up to higher management (H));

- (2) IQJ: internal market for qualified personnel, but limited to junior management (J);
- (3) VHJQ: second-job establishments for managerial and qualified personnel (HJQ) on vertical mobility channels (V);
- (4) FSQ: final (F), stable (S) establishments for qualified personnel;
- (5) IqU: internal market for semi-qualified and unqualified men (qU);
- (6) FPqU: final establishments offering promotion prospects (P) for semi-qualified and unqualified men;
- (7) FSqU: final, stable establishments for semi-qualified and unqualified men;
- (8) STqU: second-job establishments for semi-qualified and unqualified workers with a large stable core and high turnover (T);
- (9) PeA: establishments offering precarious employment (Pe) for aliens (A);
- (10) N: neutral and mixed establishments;
- (11) RW: establishments offering regular, steady employment (R) for semi-qualified and unqualified women (qUW);
- (12) TW: establishments offering jobs for women, with a high turnover;
- (13) PeW: establishments offering a high proportion of precarious jobs for women, tied to the labour market.

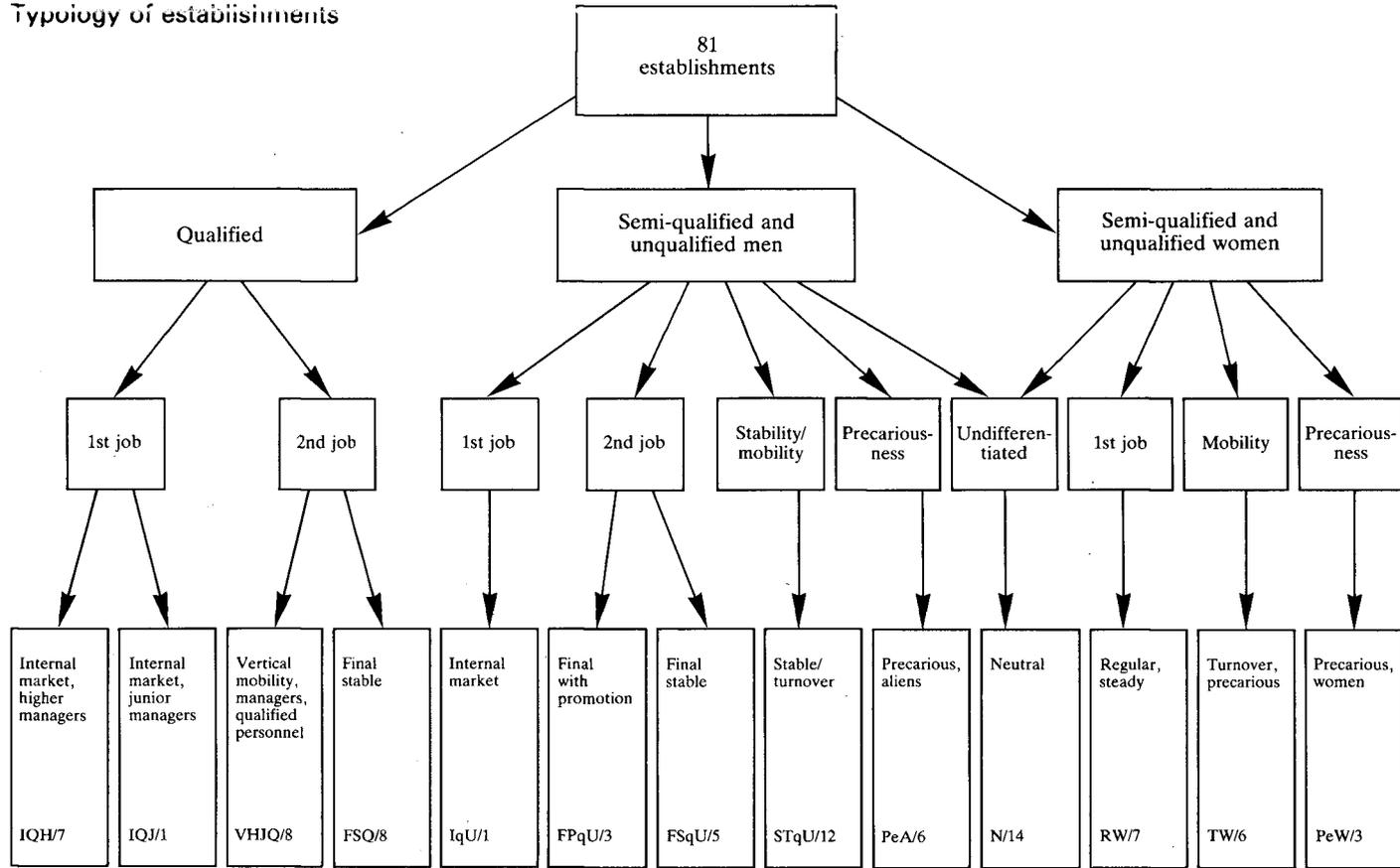
A few examples will help to clarify the typology:

Type 1 – IQH: first-job establishments offering promotion prospects to qualified personnel (Q), up to high-level management. Recruitment is primarily at the lowest grades with internal training and promotion. The establishments are medium-sized and dependent on large service sector undertakings (banks, insurance, administration, etc.). They possess an internal market permitting one or more promotions during working life. In these establishments semi-qualified and unqualified personnel (qU) are few in number and generally men.

Type 3 – VHJQ: second-job establishments for higher and junior managerial and qualified personnel (HJQ) with vertical mobility. These establishments offer highly qualified jobs with a large proportion of higher managerial posts and a large administrative staff. Engineers and university graduates not filling managerial positions are also numerous. Basically, the higher positions are filled through internal promotion, following recruitment from a previous job. Because of the high proportion of staging posts and final jobs these establishments are described as second-job establishments for managerial and qualified personnel occupying positions within vertical mobility channels either inside or outside the establishments.

Type 4 – FSQ: final, stable establishments for qualified personnel (Q). While promotion prospects still exist in this type of establishment (since they are available to approximately a quarter of the personnel), basically they recruit second-job workers who are more interested in the work itself than their

Typology of establishments



Note: The acronyms indicate the type of establishment. The figures following the acronyms indicate the number of establishments of that type.

position in the hierarchy. Some workers do, however, leave because of the lack of promotion prospects; they can realise their ambitions via the labour market.

Type 6 – FPqU: final establishments offering promotion prospects for semi-qualified and unqualified men (qU). Employing large numbers of qU, but also a moderate proportion of qualified personnel and a high proportion of junior managerial staff, these establishments possess an internal market for second-job personnel (stability demanded so that staff can undergo internal training with a view to promotion). They are thus situated at the extremity of the lateral mobility channel when the workers' desire for stability outweighs any other considerations.

Type 7 – FSqU: final, stable establishments for semi-qualified and unqualified men (qU). These establishments are situated at the extremity of lateral mobility channels; leaving them offers little advantage to an individual and can even prove to be a disadvantage after a certain time. The desire for job security and probably a specific skill would seem to offer the main explanation for this situation.

Type 8 – STqU: second-job establishments for semi-qualified and unqualified workers (qU) with both a large stable core and high turnover. Compared with type 7, the skill level is higher and the establishments are located towards the end of mainly lateral mobility channels.

Type 11 – RW: establishments offering regular steady work for semi-qualified and unqualified women (qUW). Qualified and managerial positions are few in number. Stability, which is quite considerable, is of a lateral nature (steady positions) not tied to the labour market properly speaking (entry/exit). For some women they also mark the end of lateral mobility channels, on which such establishments also happen to be positioned. Training opportunities are somewhat limited. These establishments can also offer numerous stable, final posts for managerial and qualified personnel with considerable professional experience.

The Neuchâtel labour catchment area and employment trends in the establishments

As regards employment trends, the various types of establishments can be classified as follows:

- regular growth: "internal market" (types 1, 2 and 5);
- irregular growth: "second job – managerial and qualified personnel" (type 3); "precarious – women" (type 13);
- moderate growth: "final stable – qualified personnel" (type 4); "final stable - semi-qualified and unqualified men" (type 7); "stable/turnover – semi-qualified and unqualified men" (type 8); "neutral" (type 10); "turnover" (type 12);
- slight decline: "final/promotion – semi-qualified and unqualified men" (type 6);

- decline during recession followed by strong upsurge: "precarious – aliens" (type 9);
- lasting decline: "steady, regular" (type 11).

If we assume stability in the establishments' structure, our analysis reveals that the vertical mobility segment makes a positive contribution to increasing employment. The number of steady, regular jobs, on the other hand, has declined very considerably. Trends in establishments offering final jobs have followed much the same line as those in the region as a whole, i.e. a loss of jobs that are very important for the functional balance of the area (since the types of jobs and manpower concerned are hard to find again when business recovers).

Job losses resulting from the crisis indicate the types of establishments that have been hardest hit: "neutral" (type 10), "precarious – aliens" (type 9), "stable/turnover – semi-qualified and unqualified men" (type 8); "final/promotion – semi-qualified and unqualified men" (type 6), "steady, regular" (type 11) and "second job – managerial and qualified personnel" (type 3). Most of the lay-offs affect women and aliens but there have also been considerable job losses among qualified personnel in stable jobs.

A detailed analysis of manpower flows enabled us to identify the following features:

- first-job recruitment is carried out mainly by the types of establishments that possess an internal market and, to a lesser extent, by the other types with the exception of those offering precarious jobs;
- turnover is high in the type 12 establishments and low in types 4, 5, and 7. It is very common during the first year for semi-qualified and unqualified personnel and more especially in undertakings offering precarious jobs to women;
- women can be found in the entry/exit segment ("steady, regular", "internal market – qualified" and "internal market – semi-qualified and unqualified personnel"), the lateral mobility segment ("final/promotion – semi-qualified and unqualified personnel", "neutral" and "precarious – women"), and in the segments "second job – managerial and qualified personnel" and "turnover";
- the "second job – managerial and qualified personnel" and "internal market – qualified personnel" types have a negative "recruitment/departure" balance compared with the other regions of Switzerland. Conversely, the "final/promotion", "final stable" and "internal market" for semi-qualified and unqualified personnel types have a very favourable balance. The catchment area thus proves to be retentive for that category of workers who are offered stable jobs whereas the large centres act as magnets for those seeking the most highly qualified jobs with promotion prospects. In the intermediate types there is also a certain imbalance but the scale of the outflows and the diversity

of the categories of workers make an overall analysis of these types difficult.

In short, the situation in the Neuchâtel area is a delicate one since even the final establishments are positioned on inter-regional mobility channels ending up in other regions of Switzerland. We were able to identify the intermediate position of the "second job – managerial and qualified personnel" type. Now this type of establishment is of very great importance for the functioning of the labour markets since an insufficient number of stable final jobs offering, if possible, promotion prospects can lead young people to move away at the very outset of their working life. The existence of establishments possessing an internal market does not compensate for this shortage since their contacts with the market are mainly at the first-job stage. Hence the promotion of new undertakings with an internal market in regions experiencing difficulties will not be enough to solve the structural problems of those regions.

Consequences for regional employment policy

The power of attraction of labour catchment areas

The position the establishments occupy on the mobility channels indicates that the functioning of the market at the local level depends on the particular arrangement of the various categories identified in each area. Accordingly the role played by the various establishments and their positioning on the mobility channels are fundamental.

Our investigation showed, in particular, that individuals entering the Neuchâtel area to take up employment, whether it is their first or second job, have a good chance of making a career there. Some jobs seem to offer sufficient stability to ensure that people remain in the region, stable employment being available both from the outset and later on. A local labour market structure will only be balanced, therefore, if attractive jobs are available at the various stages in a person's working life.

Hence it will be readily understood that one of the objectives of regional policy should be to regulate mobility channels at the local level with a view to avoiding overly sudden changes in them, assisting their formation or re-formation, or maintaining them, as the case may be. In concrete terms, this means that the labour catchment areas must continue to be attractive both for manpower and for undertakings.

In order to demarcate the local employment structure we have used, for lack of anything better, this notion of a labour catchment area. We feel justified in doing so inasmuch as the flows of manpower are geographically circumscribed within the catchment area, which constitutes the territory from which the undertakings recruit the majority of their personnel and in which the majority of individuals are willing to work without changing their place of residence. This is the case with two-thirds of the flows in the sample of

establishments in our survey. This area, whose bounds are generally fixed on the basis of commuter movements, does not, however, make up the total area in which all movements occur. For example, specialists and managerial personnel are frequently recruited from other parts of the country. The labour catchment area is thus the place in which the majority of the people acquire training and in which some workers improve their skills or learn new ones. Finally, it is the area in which undertakings find themselves in competition with each other in recruiting and keeping workers. The labour catchment area is thus the area for which an analysis of the functioning of the labour market makes most sense.

The concept of mobility channels shows that it is not employment itself that is important for a region but a combination of jobs, since the existence of such combinations enables the inhabitants of the region to realise their ambitions or exerts a power of attraction on workers from outside. Undoubtedly, it is the existence of a series of vertical mobility channels that is the decisive factor in ensuring a "high quality" labour market structure. More precisely, the longer the vertical mobility channels are the greater will be the power of attraction the region can exercise. For unqualified personnel it is not so much the number of possible stages along the lateral mobility channels as the opportunities to obtain stable employment or acquire a skill that appear to be important.

When we speak of regulating mobility channels this does not mean maintaining the status quo.

For a region to retain its manpower potential, it must be able to offset outflows of labour both quantitatively and qualitatively. But the mobility channels approach implies reasoning in terms of jobs. It may indeed, for example, be in a young person's interest to go to another region for training or to settle there and make a career; to offset this, however, a young person trained elsewhere should come into the region to find work or settle there permanently. In fact it is not very important to know who fills the posts, provided they are filled, and that, by and large, they form a complete structure.

Because of this, mobility can be seen as a condition for the proper functioning of the labour market but not as a remedy for inter-regional imbalances.

Hence employment policy at the local level should concern itself with the types of jobs and, consequently, the establishments offering first jobs, initial experience, etc., which give the mobility channels their specific character.

The nature of a regional employment policy

In Switzerland labour market policy is designed essentially to maintain that market's functional capacity. It is designed above all to mitigate the negative employment consequences of structural and technological change and thus to reduce the volume of frictional and structural unemployment. Policy recommendations tend to cover such things as promoting geographical

and occupational mobility, opening or closing the frontiers to immigration, and encouraging vocational training. The basic objective is thus to avoid overall quantitative imbalances and not to influence the structure or functioning of the labour market at the local level.

Seen from this angle, attempts to achieve equilibrium at the regional or local levels inhibit the overall functional capacity of the labour market. Such a labour market policy is, moreover, completely consistent with the regional policy hitherto conducted, which seeks, by means of financial incentives and the improvement of the infrastructure, to compensate for the disadvantages connected with the geographical location of peripheral regions. The policy-makers reason thus in terms of costs, and their objective is to restore the conditions for the regions to be truly competitive. In so doing, they forget, however, in the majority of cases the role played by the regional structures of the economy and the labour market. The economy cannot ignore these structures since they frequently influence the development of a region much more than a mere difference in costs.

However, while it is true that there are regional structures which cannot be ignored, the regional systems must be dynamic if there is to be balanced national development. Accordingly, it is important to stimulate regional development rather than to bypass it and aim directly at achieving national objectives by encouraging geographical labour mobility, which will only serve to accelerate the dismantling of the development potential of the regions.

The restructuring of economies which is currently imperative determines, in our view, the objectives of regional policy: regional policy should try to make the most of the development potential of the regions or revive it. In terms of jobs this means that greater efforts should be made to create or preserve attractive and diversified employment structures at the regional level. To achieve this, three types of measures can be adopted:

- (a) temporary support for some undertakings in order to avoid a time-lag between the disappearance and creation of jobs: prior discussions with the management of undertakings and groups to encourage them to introduce short-time working or bring forward restructuring plans so as to preserve as much of the regional potential as possible;
- (b) filling any gaps in the mobility channels: setting up new establishments which offer the jobs required; financial or other incentives for first-job recruitment or, in some cases, for stabilising second-job personnel; improving information within the labour catchment area; promoting in-plant training; encouraging intraregional mobility; granting of permits to foreign workers to fill openings on mobility channels; extending the possibilities offered by unemployment compensation; maintaining or re-establishing the balance between certain groups (men and women, for example) inside subdivisions, and so on;
- (c) dynamising the labour market on a long-term basis with a view to an optimal use of the regional potential: promoting balanced development

of the various types of establishments (and hence of all the major stages of the mobility channels); vocational training; measures aimed at improving services for the population seeking an attractive labour market (especially managerial personnel); improving the regional image; concerted implementation of regional policy as a whole (in the broad sense of the term, and particularly innovation, training and employment policies); measures aimed at establishing new undertakings and developing existing firms.

Over and above new measures we are proposing a different approach to regional policy. In our view such a policy should seek to stimulate and dynamise regional potential in order to preserve the coherence of mobility channels at the local level.

Regulating the mobility channels

The achievement of an inter-regional balance requires, therefore, that the power of attraction of the various labour catchment areas be maintained. This is all the more true in Switzerland where the regions are small and thus very open. Because of this the problem of employment at the regional level in Switzerland has to be stated in terms of capacity to retain or attract manpower. This means that efforts have to be made to prevent one-way flows of manpower, i.e. from the weak regions to the strong. This is only possible, however, if labour catchment areas contain sufficiently complete mobility channels to permit manpower flows between areas and between regions and sufficiently large flows inside a region for the majority of workers to find opportunities for changing jobs or settling into stable employment.

Notes

¹ H. Puel: "Il y a emploi et emploi", in *Travail et emploi* (Paris, Ministère du Travail et de la Participation, Service des études et de la statistique), Apr. 1980, No. 4, p. 20.

² D. Held and D. Maillat: *Marché de l'emploi, entreprises et région* (Lausanne, Presses polytechniques romandes, 1984).

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