

## French Regional Employment and Training Observatories (OREF): A Public Mission Network with a Wide Range of Activities to Support Decision-Makers

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This paper will present shifts in position, function and organisation of French regional training and employment observatories in the last two decades. We will focus here on regional observatories named *Observatoires Régionaux Emploi Formation (OREF)*. The OREF<sup>1</sup> network, whose creation was promoted by public authorities (which currently finance each OREF entity), is the one and only regional network specialised in employment and adult training observation activities. Still, there are other observation structures in that field, but on a local level.

The shifts experienced by the OREF should be considered in a broader landscape, starting at the end of the 70s and covering the evolution of vocational training and employment public policies, the deepening of decentralisation and the evolution of the observation task.

The OREF were created to be centres of local expertise concerning employment and training, and to study issues related to occupational qualification. Since the 80s, the environment in which the OREF evolved has changed a lot and these changes affect their missions, roles, position and organisation. The present article deals with these changes. It presents in the first part the initial situation of the OREF (1). Secondly, we explain their organisation (2) before addressing the changes and shifts they have experienced in recent years (3). These have appeared as new functions and organisation forms (4), impacts on employee's competences (5) and new perspectives (6). In each of these parts, the reader will find general comments on the situation of the OREF and also specific examples as regards the OREF of the *Provence Alpes Côte d'Azur* region, named *Observatoire régional des métiers (ORM)*.

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<sup>1</sup> The article will focus on the OREF mission, as an observation and expertise mission; even if nowadays these structures are mainly integrated in the CARIF OREF (see Box 1 and [www.intercariforef.org/formations](http://www.intercariforef.org/formations)).

### 1. A Network Created at the End of the 80s in the Context of the French Decentralisation in View of Region-Wide Integration of Employment and Training Data

The French OREF were created in the late 80s in order to accompany the decentralisation and de-concentration of employment and training policies in the framework of their public service task (Hillau and Valette, 2011). Since the end of the 80s, decentralisation *à la française* is a long-term process punctuated by several laws. When the OREF were created, in 1988, Regional Councils<sup>2</sup> were responsible for economic development, funding of education facilities and vocational training for youth. General Councils<sup>3</sup> had social actions and social policy competences and as for the State, it had competences in the field of initial education (pedagogical dimensions, curricula, and teachers), development of territories, as well as social and territorial solidarity. One of the main characteristics of the French decentralisation lies in the fact that the education, training and employment sectors are still a system with shared competences in which a large number of various actors interact (ORM, 2009). Due to decentralisation, needs for expertise in labour market functioning, organisation of the education and training system and school-to-work transition appeared at the regional level. In that context, the original mission of the OREF was to collect and provide data and information about employment and training to be made accessible to all regional actors in order to elaborate a shared knowledge of the regional situation and therefore to promote inter-institutional dialogue. The OREF, created in order to support employment and vocational training monitoring, mainly target decision-and policy-makers, to a lesser extent professionals such as guidance counsellors, youth integration advisers or vocational training providers, and more seldom the general public (CNFPTLV, 2009).

The OREF had to compile data on initial vocational training, continuing training and employment at the regional level since formerly each actor had had their own information system, not always accessible for others. Thus, **the first “job” of the OREF was and still is to collect, compile and interpret existing but dispersed data.**

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<sup>2</sup> *Conseils régionaux*: territorial authority corresponding to the first level of French administrative division, the so-called *régions*.

<sup>3</sup> *Conseils généraux*: territorial authority corresponding to the second level of French administrative division so-called *départments*.

Since the 1980s, different decentralisation laws have been issued (1982/83, 2002/2003) as well as laws concerning training and employment fields that impact regional actors' competences (1993, 2002, 2004, 2009) (Table 1). Decentralisation in the field of (vocational) education and training was conducted to accompany new competences of regions in terms of economic development (ORM, 2009). As a result of these laws, regional actors and mainly Regional Councils had been put on the foreground in regard to training issues. Specifically, the 1993 quinquennial law, which established the Regional Plan for Developing Youth Training (in French: *Plan régional de développement de la formation professionnelle des jeunes – PRDFPJ*), firstly searches a close collaboration and the logic of concerted action and secondly a closer link between training, supports for school-to-work transitions and employment development devices. Needs for expertise and objectified information have grown proportionally and the OREF are more and more solicited, hence bigger in size and more diversified in their activities.

**Table 1 Competences in employment and training of French local authorities**

	Quinquennial law concerning work, employment and vocational training (20 December 1993)	Social modernisation law (13 January 2002) Democracy of proximity law (27 February 2002)	Law on vocational training and social dialogue (4 May 2004), Law concerning local liberties and responsibilities (17 August 2004)	Law concerning guidance and lifelong learning (24 November 2009)
<b>NUTS 2:</b> <i>régions</i> in France (Regional Council)	The Regional Council constructs and develops, together with state services, the regional plan for development of VET of youth (PRDFPJ in French) (medium-term programming of VET supply, information and guidance actions) which cover initial VET, apprenticeship, CVET for young job seekers.	The regional plan (PRDFP in French) now covers VET of adults and validation of experiential learning (VAE in French). Aims are the same: to set common objectives of development of VET of youth and adults in the region involving different actors of the field.	The regional plan now extends to social medical and artistic VET; to adult VET proposed by the national association for adult VET (AFPA in French)	The regional plan now becomes a contract between the Regional Council and the state services at regional level (CPRDFP in French). It is now elaborated within a chamber (CCREFP in French) with regional authorities, national state services, and branches and signed by the State and the region.

Quinquennial law concerning work, employment and vocational training (20 December 1993)				
Social modernisation law (13 January 2002)				
Democracy of proximity law (27 February 2002)				
Law on vocational training and social dialogue (4 May 2004), Law concerning local liberties and responsibilities (17 August 2004)				
Law concerning guidance and lifelong learning (24 November 2009)				
<b>NUTS 3:</b>				
<b><i>départements</i></b>				
<b>in France</b>				
<b>(General Council)</b>			General Council had competences as concerns environment (water, waste); accommodation (proximity equipment); education (medical and technical staff, transport in secondary education); culture.	

Source: own presentation.

As youth unemployment has become a structural problem since the late 70s, it has become the paramount priority for public actors to have better knowledge of the labour market functioning, organisation of education and training systems and school-to-work transitions. Training is considered as solution against unemployment.

## **2. National-Regional Co-Funding and Non-Profit Status for a Role of “Acting Together Makers”**

### ***National-Regional co-funding, shared governance and non-profit organisation***

There is one OREF in each administrative region in France (26 metropolitan or overseas regions). They have two main types of status: non-profit associations or public interest groupings (GIP). In terms of organisation, in the years 2000 they could be, like the majority of observatories, integrated to a larger structure with the CARIF (Centre for Animation, Resources and Information on Training), or autonomous structures. The remainder were usually part of another structure (e.g. within the Regional Council or integrated in an Industry and Commerce Chamber). However, these two last options are not very common.

## Box 1 The CARIF OREF Network<sup>4</sup>



The CARIF OREF national network is present in each of the 26 French regions.

The different CARIF and OREF fulfil three principal functions, the first two functions managed by CARIF services (standing for *Centre d'animation, de ressources et d'information sur la formation*) and the third one insured by the OREF services (standing for *Observatoire regional emploi formation*).

- Their first function is to facilitate the development of lifelong learning in French regions, giving a wide access to **information** about adult training programmes, trainees' rights, qualifications, and different routes or pathways to certifications and vocational trainings.
- Their second function is to contribute towards the **professionalisation** of the regional and infra-regional networks that are dealing with adult training and employment services (information officers, career counsellors, trainers, adult training project leaders, etc.).
- Their third function is dedicated to **observation** and statistics activities, in order to help regional decision makers in adult training and labour market monitoring (further information below).

The CARIF and OREF are in charge of public service missions. They are generally jointly financed by the Government and the Regions, and are linked with social partners.

The CARIF OREF network is constituted as a non-profit making association. The national association of the CARIF OREF called RCO (*Réseau des CARIF OREF*) organises every year an annual meeting. The CARIF and OREF also have the opportunity to exchange their practices, taking part in different workshops.

Source: own presentation.

**Their co-funding by the central government, through its regional office, and the regions** is formalised in the framework of National State-Region Project Contract (*Contrat de projet Etat Région – CPER*), which are multi-annual contracts, for five years in general. Specifications about missions and orientations

<sup>4</sup> For more details see: [www.intercariforef.org/formations/reseau-carif.html](http://www.intercariforef.org/formations/reseau-carif.html).

of the OREF are to be found in the contract. For example, in the 2007-2013 contracts, it is mentioned that the OREF have to contribute to “anticipating and accompanying demographic, social and economic changes”. Some OREF could have specific funding for specific missions coming from the Regional Council but also from other local actors such as branches, national state services, etc.

In terms of governance, nearly all OREF have a general assembly or administration council whose roles are to elaborate strategic and budgetary orientations, and to follow activities and annual programmes. This authority is composed of representatives of state services, regional councils and social partners. The OREF frequently have partnerships on a regional level, with professional branches, trade unions and employers’ confederations or associations, public or private networks specialised in training and employment issues.

In several OREF, a “scientific authority” generally is also to be found – called scientific committee or committee of experts – which has to set up the scientific programme, discuss methods and evaluate works.



## Box 2 The core activity of *Observatoire regional des métiers (ORM)*<sup>5</sup>, the OREF of the *Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur* region and its governance

The ORM is the regional employment and training observatory of the PACA region (*Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur*), located in Marseille, the administrative capital of South-East France. The ORM is a non-profit association, which was founded in December 1997.



As every OREF, the core activity of the ORM is to collect and analyse regional and infra-regional data in regard to the development of:

- Employment, skills, qualifications and training actions (with a special focus on analysing the development of relations between qualifications and adult training actions)
- Needs and expectations of the different target groups and partners involved in adult training actions (e.g. regional decision-makers, professionals, trainees)

As far as methods are concerned, the ORM collect **and** analyse quantitative or qualitative data. The ORM also moderates working groups, bringing together regional decisions makers, researchers, and data experts.

### Form of governance

An observatory like the ORM, working with many public institutions and obliged to take into account their diverging interests, has to remain neutral.

This commitment has a major influence on their form of governance:

- The ORM is a non-profit organisation and its activities are equally financed by the Regional Council and the local State services.
- Social partners are involved in the management of the organisation since the President of the ORM (elected for three years) is alternatively a trade union leader or a representative of an employers' association.
- The management board of the ORM is composed of members coming from different institutions. Four permanent boards of stakeholders (six seats each) are reserved for the representatives of the State services, the Regional Council, the employers' association and the trade unions. Other institutions such as the French National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies (Insee) or the Public

<sup>5</sup> For more details see: [www.orm-paca.org](http://www.orm-paca.org).

Employment Services (*Pôle Emploi*, *Association Française pour la Formation des Adultes*) are associated members of the ORM's management.

- The ORM also has a “scientific committee” whose members are statisticians, research and survey experts belonging to public institutions (the Regional Council, the State services), to the public office for statistics (Insee), to the public institute for employment and training (Céreq) or to university labs. The members of the scientific committee offer their advice on most decisions related to the ORM's activity (e.g. orientations, new projects, methods).

Source: own presentation.

The OREF is run by its Director and has a team of survey executives who are in charge of specific topics such as disabled people, territories, forecasting, industries and occupations, discrimination issues, care and social sectors, green economy and impacts on jobs and qualifications.

This position characterised by the co-funding regional services of the central government and region, the shared governance including social partners and the non-profit association status are linked with the role of making actors communicate, exchange and work together in a context of a public competences split in the education and employment sectors. All these elements have put the OREF in a special position within the regional landscape and within the constellation of employment and training observatories.

### ***A central position within the constellation of training and employment observatories***

In France, in the field of employment, education and training, numerous types of observatories exist on different geographical levels.

There are some national institutions with the following focus:

- Céreq<sup>6</sup> is a centre of public expertise dedicated to key players in training and employment. Céreq is involved in the production of statistics, in research activity and in providing support for the implementation of policies. It gives out advice and counselling intended to clarify choices in the area of training policy at regional, national or international level.

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<sup>6</sup> For more details see: [www.cereq.fr](http://www.cereq.fr).

- The French National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies (Insee)<sup>7</sup> produces data and analyses on labour market, employment and training.
- The observatories of branches and industrial sectors provide data about the labour market and training issues for their own perimeter, and conduct or command specific and thematic studies on these questions. These branches' and sectors' observatories have been introduced by a national inter-professional agreement of 5 December 2003 addressing employees' access to lifelong learning.

The observatories at regional level focus on observation activities, offering their services to decision-makers and the general public:

- The OREF are the main observatories.
- The French National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies (Insee) has in each region a regional direction that provides data and analysis in employment, training and labour market issues at the regional level.
- Several state services, de-concentrated at regional level, are also involved in statistical and survey activities. For example, each regional department of industry and employment services (Direccte), subordinate to the Ministry of Labour, has its own survey, statistics and evaluation service called SESE (standing for *Services Etudes Statistiques Evaluation*).
- Some regional observatories of branches as in the building sector can also be mentioned.

At the local level, an increasing number of observatories exist. As local territories emerge (counties, grouping of towns, conurbations, urban districts), they create their own observatory. The central government has also initiated the creation of local observatories like the Territorial Employment Centre (in French *Maison de l'emploi*)<sup>8</sup>, which have, in addition to their mission as part of

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<sup>7</sup> For more details see: [www.insee.fr](http://www.insee.fr).

<sup>8</sup> The *Maisons de l'emploi* were publicly established by the Act of 30 June 2004: 300 of them were supposed to be created in France. Their governance generally involves both deconcentrated services of the State, territorial authorities, public employment services (*Pôle Emploi*) and other local

public employment services, an observation mission. They collect and synthesise data on employment, labour market and training fields for their territorial zone (infra NUTS 3).

### Box 3 Networking with other regional or infra-regional data experts

Existing in each French region, the OREF services are generally well recognised as regional experts on the relationship between employment and qualifications.

They tend to develop many partnerships with other observatories or survey services:

- Because the OREF often do not produce their own data, they collect and analyse public statistics provided by official offices (Insee, data service of the Ministry of Labour, etc.) with whom they sign partnership agreements or charters of co-operation.
- Also, they are sometimes asked to support local observatories in their activities, for example getting involved in their scientific committee.

In *Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur*, apart from those regular partnerships, the ORM has taken part in an initiative that federates six public research and survey producers whose common point is to work on topics related to jobs, work, and employment, some of them specialised in quantitative methods, some focusing more on qualitative approaches. They have created the *Pôle régional travail* (PRT) in order to share their methods, organise common seminars with a multidisciplinary approach, or consult each other in order to bid on calls for projects.

Source: own presentation.

Among all observatories, the OREF occupy a special position because they are deeply involved in social debates and stakeholders' concerns and, on the other hand as they received multiannual public funding, they construct knowledge, problematise observations and issues and take distance in their studies and publications, always based on scientific and objectives methods.

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labour market agencies. On their territory, they fulfil different missions such as employment forecasting and monitoring, guidance, etc.

### ***An official network of observatories at national level***

Before 2011, the OREF used to work in an informal network involving working groups, thematic collegial approaches and exchange on practices and information. For a long time, a conference of the OREF's directors has existed.

In the past three years, while many OREF have been merged in the CARIF structure, they have developed a national visibility for their structure, which helps them to promote their activities and the support they offer to decision-makers. To reach this goal, they have constituted a national association called the CARIF OREF Network (in French *Réseau des Carif-Oref* – RC) with a general assembly and a chairman.

### **3. Developments, Changes, Processes?**

In the recent period, the OREF have experienced shifts concerning topics and types of work as well as activities. In general, we notice a diversification and an increasing complexity of topics they deal with in terms of economic development of territories and regions. These changes result from different types of drivers at different levels: political, economic and internal to observatories.

Through the latest laws concerning occupational training (2002, 2004, 2009), regional authorities and above all the Regional Councils, have extended their competences. They are now the leader in the field of occupational training policies. Indeed, France is going through a deepening of decentralisation with extended competences of the Regional Councils in the fields of adult training, guidance and economic development. Beyond this enlargement and enforcement of competences, a closer link is observed between employment and training policies on the one hand and economic development policies on the other hand. In that context, the OREF face a growing demand for expertise, data and analyses from regional actors. The observatories are asked to take into account economic shifts in their monitoring of training. Finally, following to European Union guidelines, policies relate to the concepts of lifelong learning and guidance and focus on individual pathways.

#### **Box 4      A major issue for the ORM: Helping the Regional Council and their partners to monitor regional schemes of vocational training**

In accordance with the 24 November 2009 Act, each Regional Council – after a discussion with the major public and private regional institutions (social partners, public employment service, etc.) – has to sign with the State a contract – a regional plan – for the development of vocational training (called CPRDFP, standing for *Contrat de plan regional de développement de la formation professionnel*). The aim of this contract is to plan vocational training actions targeted towards young people and adults as well as to ensure a coherent and coordinated development of different vocational training pathways.

Most of the CARIF OREF have been involved in assisting their Regional Council and their partners in the preparation and/or the realisation of the CPRDFP.

In regard to the region *Provence Alpes-Côte d’Azur*, the ORM, in partnership with the regional CARIF (called *Espace Compétences*) has been in charge of the prior diagnosis phase of the CPRDFP (consisting of six subject files) and is now involved in the monitoring and evaluation approach of the contract plan.

Source: own presentation.

The economic crisis has various consequences. Firstly, as the environment is more and more instable, policy-makers spread their demand in terms of monitoring, forecasting. They need analyses that linked economic, training and employment issues. Secondly, as public funding is becoming less important, policy makers try to enforce control and to evaluate public policies according to their effect on target groups. The development of an evaluation culture, not very wide-spread in France, changes the needs and therefore the demands towards the OREF.

The internal shift of the OREF structure concerns the growing competences and human resources they have gained. From the end of 80s marking their creation, they have constructed real teams with well specified competences. The largest OREF employs nearly 20 people. So they are in a position to propose studies and orientations and to recommend subjects to be investigated.

All these drivers have had consequences on organisation, functions and topics of the OREF. If each OREF remains specific because of peculiar local environment and history, most of them affected by the changes we are going to explain.

#### 4. Functions and Organisation Forms Today

##### ***New organisation***

Strengthening by their organisation as a national association, OREF constitute working groups with national institutions and state services. They work to reinforce their statistic tools and methods, to accumulate from each other experiment and reinforce their collective expertise regarding some key topics: forecasting, employment-training relation... With the chairman of the association, they have now a national representative.

##### ***Functions: from observation toward guidelines to decision-makers***

As we exposed drivers of changes earlier in the paper, we will now focus on new functions and topics for the OREF.

In terms of functions, they are more and more mobilised to carry out shared diagnoses. It does not only come to collecting, synthesising and presenting data. Now the task is to construct the diagnoses with stakeholders, to integrate them at the beginning of the work in order to enlarge their appropriation of results. The mission extends to a role of animation and to clearly support the decision-makers.

### Box 5      Some examples of workshops built by the ORM in order to support employment and training regional monitoring

The common point of most discussion groups that the ORM has created is to provide a shared diagnosis, crossing the points of view of two types of regional actors:

- Policy-makers in charge of employment and training actions on a regional level (those policy makers are generally representatives of public institutions but also social partners, members of branches or other actors from professional organisations, and heads of regional networks dealing with adult training programmes or career guidance)
- Experts belonging to public statistics services and institutes, research university labs or information centres, specialised in education, adult training and socio-economic analyses of employment.

Following that objective, the ORM has launched workshops on different topics:

- One of them is called *Atelier Mutations et Qualifications* (AMQ) which means a workshop centred on the relation between economic changes and qualifications. Analysing the evolution of economic sectors, its purpose is to work on qualification stakes in PACA region.
- Another workshop, formerly part of AMQ, is named *Objectif Paca Conjoncture* (OPC). The idea of this group session, created because of the economic crisis, is to gather cyclical statistical or qualitative information on specific infra-regional territories, populations, or economic sectors that are pointed out by policy makers (because they seem to be confronted with some difficulties) in order to build appropriate employment and training strategies.
- ORM coordinates another workshop dealing with the question of equality between men and women in training and employment (*Réseau régional pour l'égalité entre les femmes et les hommes*).

Source: own presentation.

The OREF position shifts from observation toward the task to give guidelines to decision-makers, to manage and assist working of institutional working groups or workshops. They go beyond their technical mission. Moreover, with the development of evaluation approaches, the OREF are asked to give tools and materials for the evaluation.



In the same area, the multiplication of local observatories creates a need for coordination, harmonisation and in some regions the OREF are asked to do so.

***Topics: from training-employment relation to training-employment-economic development relation***

Concerning the topics of the OREF work and approach, the main change is the diversification of topics and the closer link approach which incites them to consider more than before the economic development aspects and to take into account economic and industrial policies. At the beginning, they worked on employment-training relations, analysing employment and school-to-work transitions. Nowadays, they can no longer limit their work to these topics and are solicited to enlighten the broader issue of anticipation and support of economic changes, or the link between training, employment and economic development of territories. The forecasting dimension in regard to employment, qualification requirements and training is now in the foreground, taking on several forms such as previsions and projections.

In 2011, the ministerial circular edited by the Ministry of Labour explained that the OREF's mission is to contribute to observation, analysis and forecasting on the evolution of employment, skills, competences, training and training-employment relation as well as the evolution of needs and expectations of publics and that, by taking into account economic, demographic and social developments.

**Box 6 Building a regional forecasting approach: a current stake for the ORM and other OREFs**

For a long time, most forecasting approaches in France have been based on a national level, using macroeconomic models. But because the French *Conseils régionaux* (regional councils) are responsible for professional training monitoring, they express a strong demand for forecasting tools as regards the development of employment. Other actors, such as professional branches or regional state services (like *Prefecture*), involved in regional employment and training monitoring also express their needs as concerns forecasting. And the OREF are now officially requested to work on that field (since the ministerial circular of July 2011 edited by the Ministry of Labour).

Hence, the ORM is now working on a forecasting project called PRES (*Projections regionales d'emplois sectoriels*), in partnership with Insee (the French National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies) and with the regional statistics and survey services of the Ministry of Labour. The first results of this project should be delivered at the end of 2013. It is based on both quantitative and qualitative approaches: its purpose is to develop sectoral employment projections on a regional scale but also to moderate focus groups involving branches, and other regional experts in order to discuss those projections and question the consequences as concerns training priorities.

The ORM is not the only French regional employment and training observatory working on a forecasting tool: the OREF of other regions such as *Île de France*, *Midi-Pyrénées* and *Centre* have already built their own approach. Moreover, the CARIF OREF network has launched an interregional workshop related to forecasting methods, in order to share good practices. In 2012, the network dedicated its annual congress to that issue (which took place in Toulouse on 27 and 28 September).

Source: own presentation.

To ensure such missions, the OREF are solicited to give mid-term tools and dynamic diagnoses, ranging from five to ten years, because this is the term of technological and organisational innovations, and also the term of changes linked with education curricula and pathways and organisation shifts. The mid-term perspective also allows having information coming from industries and branches. So concerning forecasting, the OREF tend to have two main aims, on the one hand the structuration of the collective reflection and on the other hand the production of dynamic diagnoses, which could help to highlight work tendencies, to spot specific stakes variables in order to construct hypotheses which could help to elaborate the scenarios.

## 5. Competencies of Employees

Originally, the OREF employees are surveys executives with technical competences in labour economy, sociology, or they are statisticians. They are asked to be good technicians. Nowadays, beyond that, they must be able to manage working groups, lead debates between several partners and stakeholders at regional level and construct guidelines for decision makers. So there has been a shift from purely technical competences towards relational skills. Concerning the topics, the OREF need people who have competences in the field of public policy evaluation and forecasting.

### **Box 7 How the ORM is improving the skills of its survey executives with new kinds of training actions**

The ORM's survey executives have always regularly participated in training actions. However, in the past, those actions were only technical, dealing with statistics, survey methods and software (trainings concerning data bases, survey software, etc.)

Since the ORM's researchers are more and more requested to conduct large-scale projects with partners, the range of training actions proposed to them has grown wider: in particular, two training programmes have been launched at the ORM recently to extend survey executives' skills:

- One concerns project management methods, so that survey executives are able to build the strategic and operational planning of the projects they work on, manage their budget and evaluate the completed actions.
- The second training action concerns moderation methods, including techniques such as focus groups, in order to be able to conduct group discussions with different kinds of institutions.

Source: own presentation.

The structuring of the OREF as a national association helps them to accompany this shift in skills need with the organisation of thematic groups to exchange good practices, confront methods, train people and enlarge competences.

## 6. Perspectives: Maintaining an Original Position

In France, the OREF have found a special position at the regional level between the central government services and regional councils. They acquired for most of them recognition for their work and are considered “neutral observers”. Their co-funding and the fact that their governance is shared between national state, regional councils and social partners give them an atypical but very interesting and strategic position. With the new generation of project contracts between the State and Regional Councils for the period 2013-2018, we do not know exactly if funding shares will remain 50/50 between both sides. If not, this “neutral” position might be questioned. For example, if Regional Councils are to play a more important role, will the current autonomy of the OREF be the same? In the context of economic crisis and rising unemployment, we notice the development of demand in terms of adequacy between training and employment, in terms matching projections of employment need with youth leaving educational system. One of the future challenges for the OREF is to explain and to be heard by decision makers about the fact that reality is significantly more complex in that field.

On the other hand, the multiplication of local observatories creates new challenges and functions for the OREF at the regional level: the challenge to organise and to make environment “readable” for publics and policy makers, to give sense to all analyses and diagnoses that are produced, to collect and interpret them for the territory.

Finally, if nowadays the points of reference for the OREF are naturally the regional, inter-regional and national levels, the European one could be a perspective. Strengthened by their structuring into a national network, the OREF could be more easily connected to European issues. Some of them, in particular those situated in a cross-border area, have contacts to foreign observatories as concerns cross-border workers. Others have established contacts on a peculiar subject, like forecasting in the case of *Region Centre* in France, which has links with an Italian observatory in Piedmont.

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## Websites

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Centre d'études et de recherche sur les qualifications (Céreq): [www.cereq.fr](http://www.cereq.fr)

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