

THE LOSS OF ATTRACTIVENESS OF THE TERRITORIAL PUBLIC SERVICE IN THE COUNTRIES OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

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Abstract: The deterioration of the attractiveness of public service jobs is an obvious process. In European countries where decentralization has played a preponderant role, we can see the free fall of interest of young people to engage in local institutions. More difficult recruitment. The average number of candidates for a position offered has fallen in Germany from 16 in 1997 to 6 in 2022, while in France from 17 in 1996 to 8 in 2023. The crisis of vocations. With the arrival of new generations on the labor market, the point of view concerning the attractiveness and the advantages of the public service is changing: what was, for a long time, perceived as an advantage becomes a disadvantage. The questioning of selection by competition. Long, complex and perceived as excessively competitive, the competitive examination procedure attracts fewer candidates, unlike the contractual route which continues to develop within public employment. The number of candidates for the various State civil service competitions was divided by three between 1997 (650,000 candidates) and 2018 (228,000 candidates) in France. What are the factors through which these trends can be explained? The level of remuneration ? The management style in the civil service is sometimes out of step with the expectations of candidates: civil servants want to work in a more modern, less bureaucratic and more agile environment. B- Specific obstacles to the territorial civil service Despite their advantages, territorial jobs are struggling to attract. Territorial jobs have undeniable advantages to stand out in the job market: jobs rooted in reality, meaningful and established in a territory, project-based work organization, short hierarchical chain, etc. However, these advantages do not remedy a decline in attractiveness: 39% of territorial employers said they were having difficulty attracting candidates in 2021, 9 points more than in 2015. Lack of awareness of this employment sector. The methods of accessing the territorial civil service are considered unclear and, in fact, not popular with candidates. The territorial sector does not benefit from a sufficient media showcase that would allow candidates to better understand the jobs in the sector. The constraints inherent in the size of the employing local authority and its location. In a small municipality, recruitment is made more difficult by the distance and the risk of isolation. Career prospects are also fewer. Incomplete information about the positions to be filled. Candidate experience is a factor that can harm the attractiveness of the territorial civil service. Candidates want more fluidity and transparency during the recruitment process, with job descriptions providing more useful information to better understand the position on offer.

Keywords: Administration, Local Government, Human Resources, The image of the public service

1. INTRODUCTION

In this article we will try to answer the following imperative: What is the employer brand or how to reflect the image of the territorial public service to make it a real tool of attractiveness and competitiveness. Let's start with the employer brand? The employer brand is a human resources management tool... The employer brand corresponds to a set of communication and marketing tools and strategies that allow both to promote an employer to potential candidates, but also to retain and retain talent. It is built on the employer's image, but also on its ability to provide a work environment that meets the expectations of its employees. The challenges of the employer brand are multiple, both externally, to attract new talent, and internally, to develop or strengthen a sense of belonging to an organization that resembles them. ... in resonance with the issues of attractiveness of the territorial public service. Developing an employer brand can help a community to recruit more and better. It helps to counteract preconceived ideas that damage the image of civil servants, by revealing the variety of jobs on offer. It can be an opportunity to modernize recruitment processes, in order to better target candidates and attract profiles consistent with the values and skills sought by the community. One or more employer brand(s)? The diversity of professions, missions, training, and expected skills cannot be summarized in a single employer brand, at the risk of complicated the readability of institutions: a single employer brand for the State or even the territorial civil service thus seems neither relevant nor effective. Conversely, the multiplication of employer brands within the same restricted territory could cause confusion among potential candidates. A strategy that complements that of territorial marketing. Territorial marketing aims to highlight the assets of a local authority to attract people, but also businesses, infrastructure, cultural events, etc. The employer brand of a local authority and territorial marketing are therefore complementary, with the latter providing additional arguments to attract potential candidates and their families to the local authority.(Guery, B. 2022, p.34,)

2. KEY FACTORS FOR THE SUCCESS OF AN EMPLOYER BRAND

Choose the relevant geographic stratum. Smaller municipalities do not have enough resources to allocate to the development of an employer brand. Moreover, it would be less relevant on a small scale since the number of opportunities is limited and the needs of the community are more specific. It therefore seems wiser to create an employer brand on a larger scale, at the level of large cities, inter-municipalities, departments or regions. The goal is to pool resources, to highlight an identity that brings together several municipalities and to promote both the territory and local professions. Define a clear employer identity and proposition. The foundation of the employer brand lies in both the candidate promise and the employee promise. In order to build its employer brand, the local authority must first consider defining its identity, its values, its culture, its comparative advantages, the elements that make its members choose to work there. Involve elected officials and local teams in developing the employer brand. In order to build a coherent employer brand that is faithful to reality, a dialogue must be initiated with all stakeholders of the local authority, i.e. elected officials, the perfect local relays for the brand, and local teams, who must identify with the identity conveyed by the brand. (Harney, B./Alkhalaf, H., 2021, 5-29,p.) Consider both recruitment and retention of candidates. The employer brand must enable the local authority to make itself better known and recruit the talents best suited to its needs. Once the recruitment phase is over, the employer brand intervenes throughout the agent's life - 9 - be invited to participate in the evolution of the employer brand, and can even become its ambassadors. Use the full range of digital tools. Creating a website or using social networks are effective vectors for relaying agent testimonials, publishing job descriptions or job offers, communicating on the history, developments of the structure or on the work atmosphere and environment. Evaluate and improve the effectiveness of the employer brand. Consistency is one of the ingredients for the success of an employer brand, which must therefore evolve as the community changes. In this regard, it is interesting to use quantitative and/or qualitative tools to measure the effectiveness and real impact of an employer brand on recruitment. In an information report "Attractiveness of the job of town hall secretary - Making the job of town hall secretary a real job!", a particular and especially problematic case was highlighted within the local public service, that of town hall secretaries. In line with this work, this information report aims to adopt a broader perspective on employment in local authorities. Because mayors and other local elected officials know, our local authorities are encountering increasing difficulties in recruiting for the positions to be filled, and then in retaining their agents. However, the issue is nothing less than the proper functioning of local public services, which relies so much on the quality and sense of commitment of the staff in charge. (Juestz de Mire, M. 2024) The risk also lies, due to a drying up of candidates, in the discouragement of local elected officials, who suffer from understaffing and are nevertheless accountable for the effectiveness of public action before the population. Faced with an unprecedented situation that is tending to become entrenched under the effect of current tensions on the job market, local authorities are exploring new ways to strengthen, or restore, their attractiveness as employers. Among these innovations, the employer brand strategy has particularly caught the attention of your rapporteurs. A marketing technique at the crossroads of human resources and communication, employer branding is presented as a way of rethinking the community's recruitment approach, of repositioning the employer / employee relationship in a more egalitarian direction, and of highlighting the identity of the local authority as well as the meaning of the missions it offers. (Casad, B.J., Franks, J.E., Garasky, C.E., Kittlement, M.M. Roesler, A.C., Hall,D.Y., Petzel, Z.W. (2021, 13-23, p.)

3. RECRUITMENT IS MORE DIFFICULT

Recruitment is more difficult In France as of December 31, 2021, 5.67 million agents worked in the civil service, which represents approximately "one job in five" on a national scale to quote the observation of Ms. Marie-Laure Blot, employer branding project manager at the firm We Fell Good. The key figures for the civil service and their distribution of the 5.67 million civil servants between the three sides of the civil service are as follows: - State civil service: 2.52 million agents (i.e. 45% of public employment), including 78% in ministries and 22% in national public administrative establishments. - territorial civil service: 1.93 million agents (i.e. 34% of public employment), including 72% in regions, departments and municipalities, and 28% in local public administrative establishments. - hospital civil service: 1.21 million agents (i.e. 21% of public employment), including 87% in hospitals, 9% in residential care facilities for the elderly and 4% in other medical-social establishments. Among civil service agents, 37% fall into hierarchical category A (including 2% in category A+), 17% in category B and 46% in category C. Finally, 35% of civil service agents are aged 50 or over (compared to 30% in the private sector). 63% of civil service agents are women (compared to 46% in the private sector). 43% of category A+ jobs are held by women, 53% are held by employees aged 50 or over.(de Saint-Sernin, J., 2022)

4. THE CRISIS OF VOCATIONS

Among the factors behind this lack of attractiveness common to the three public services, there is a real crisis of vocations with regard to professions in the public sphere. With the arrival of new generations (X, Y, Millennials, Z, etc.) on the job market, the point of view concerning the attractiveness and advantages of the public service is changing. Imperceptibly what was, for a long time, perceived as an advantage is turning into a disadvantage. The status of civil servant, a lesser attraction? Despite the lesser enthusiasm for professions in the public sphere, certain elements specific to the status of the civil service deserve to be highlighted. Job stability: civil service competitions allow the successful candidate to be appointed to a position and thus have access to a job guarantee that can prove significant in times of economic crisis and rising unemployment. Unlike the private sector, civil servants are not subject to the labor code and are not attached to their employer by a contract. Civil servants benefit from a status defining their roles as civil servants and the missions relating to their position. Internal development prospects: the majority of positions obtained by external competition allow agents, after a few years of service and if they wish, to apply for internal competitions to potentially access a position in the higher category. The conditions for applying for internal competitions are set by the administrations opening these positions, with the majority of positions being accessible without any diploma or age requirements. These development possibilities, as well as the diversity of career paths and profiles, bring real richness to the daily life of working in the civil service. The upwardly scalable nature of remuneration: civil servants receive remuneration based on their index level. This remuneration index corresponds to the points that the agent accumulates according to his category and seniority. The pay scales therefore indicate the remuneration of agents according to their status, category and seniority. In this way, a public agent sees his remuneration increase as he gains skills (changes category) and seniority. This principle of evolution guarantees a clear and predictable remuneration trajectory, which contrasts with the private sector where salary fluctuations can be much more marked. Integrated training: some competitions do not give direct access to a position but to training allowing the acquisition of the methods and skills necessary for the targeted profession (tax schools, national police school, national customs school, etc.). These training courses are paid and are generally accompanied by an internship period allowing the discovery of the entirety of the position before being made permanent. (Juestz de Mire, M. 2024)

5. BELONGING TO A BODI SERVING THE GENERAL INTEREST

The civil service allows its agents to work in compliance with common professional and human values (secularism, equal treatment and equal opportunities, etc.) and to have them applied around them. In addition to this aspect, the public agent fulfills a mission of general interest, that is to say that his role and his missions contribute to the common good. They animate the community and living together by creating the conditions for a rule of law. The fact is that the younger generations entering the job market want, in addition to recognition and the desire to give meaning to their careers, more freedom and autonomy. They refuse to see themselves confined to functions with limited prospects for development. For these new generations, freedom of employment largely takes precedence over the security offered by the status¹. The lack of interest of the new generations in public service careers also finds part of its origin in new aspirations perceived as insufficiently taken into account by public administrations. More specifically, ecological, social concerns or those related to the digital transition represent increasingly determining criteria in career guidance, particularly for the new generations. However, in the minds of job seekers today, public administrations do not spontaneously impose themselves as models in these aspects, even if this perception does not necessarily correspond to reality. Furthermore, we cannot ignore the loss of attractiveness caused by remuneration that is not competitive enough compared to the private sector and whose relative weakness is less and less compensated for by other counterparts. Finally, the tarnished image of the civil servant constitutes an additional cause of the loss of attractiveness of the public sphere. Of course, criticism of civil servants is not new in our country and even represents a hackneyed "chestnut" (supposedly excessive number of public agents, supposedly too short working hours, etc.). But in a context of tensions on the job market that put the candidate in an unprecedented position of choice and strength, these unjustified attacks contribute to making the task of public administrations even more difficult in their recruitment objectives. Drawing the consequences of this profound transformation of approaches, Marie-Laure Blot notes that only "one young person in six says they are interested in a job in the public sector". Compared with the public employment rate (one job in five), this proportion reflects the current challenge of recruitment within the public service, which is facing a very real crisis of vocations. (Jackson, T. 2020,)

6. THE QUESTIONING OF SELECTION BY COMPETITION

For a long time, the competition has been the cornerstone of recruitment within the civil service and this principle has not been contested. However, now the recruitment procedure by competition is also facing an undeniable

questioning. Long, complex or even perceived as excessively competitive, it attracts fewer candidates, unlike the contractual route which continues to develop within public employment¹. Both on the side of the public employer and the candidate, the use of the contract is on the rise and allows a vacant position to be filled quickly while satisfying both parties. On the contrary, the competition is of little interest to the younger generations today, and is even judged harshly as an archaic process. This change in the relationship with the competition finds an unambiguous quantitative translation. Thus, the 2022 annual report on the state of the civil service highlights a decline in the number of candidates for competitive examinations since the mid-1990s. It specifies in particular that "the average number of candidates for a position offered has thus fallen from 16 in 1997 to 6 in 2022". As an illustration, in the external competition for primary school teachers in 2022, registrations recorded an alarming drop: out of 41,641 registrants (compared to 84,131 in 2019), only 14,112 took the written tests (compared to 26,657 the previous year). A study devoted to external recruitment in the State civil service notes that out of 39,900 proposed positions open for recruitment, just over 3,100 State civil service positions were not filled in 2021, or 8% of the positions. (Coriat, B. , 2020) Conducted by the DGAFP, this study¹ details that the gap observed between the number of positions offered and the number of candidates recruited can be explained by three notable reasons: - "some of those admitted withdraw after the competition"; - "the level of the candidates present is sometimes insufficient in relation to the requirements of the competition"; - "some positions do not attract enough candidates". Another part of this DGAFP study shows the growing disenchantment with the restrictive format of the competition. In his analysis, he relies on the selectivity of the competition (number of successful candidates out of the number of candidates present at the first test), a traditional, albeit indirect, indicator of the loss of attractiveness of the public sector. The selectivity in the competitions stands at six candidates present for one admitted to the State civil service in 2021. Although selectivity "increases very slightly" after several years of decline, it nevertheless remains at "a historically low level," observes the DGAFP. This selectivity within the State civil service has in fact been divided "by more than two" for external competitions, going from 12 in 2007 to 5.6 in 2021. The DGAFP specifies that this selectivity "has never been so low" for category A and B competitions. It amounts to 5.1 (compared to 9.2 in 2007) and 5.8 (compared to 14.4 in 2007) respectively. The selectivity for category C competitions in the State civil service is 9.2. While the competition no longer resonates with the expectations of many potential candidates, it also has limitations that are becoming increasingly clear on the side of public administrations. (Comby, J.B./Dubuisson-Quellier, S. 2023)The terms of the competition are sometimes not in line with the needs of public structures. The nature of the tests does not always allow us to know exactly whether the candidate's skills will be sufficient to occupy the position for which he or she is applying. Depending on the competitions, the tests do not always integrate all the challenges of the job. In such a situation, a gap between the competition and the job may emerge. This is the case in several competitions that lead to jobs incorporating hierarchical or project management. Within these, the "managerial dimension is [unfortunately] not always integrated [within] the tests themselves" (Islam, M. A.,/ Hunt, A., /Jantan, A. H., /Hashim, H. / Chong C.W. 2019)The question of the competition calendar is also a factor likely to harm the desire to join the ranks of the civil service. Indeed, it is a deterrent for many candidates, since they cannot always afford to wait for the opening of the next examination session. This is, for example, the case for the territorial attaché competition, which only takes place every two years, or for specific sectors for which the tests are sometimes only organized every three or four years. In the absence of an annual exam or a shorter recurrence, some candidates then turn away, much against their will, from the public sphere in favor of the private sector. This poor match is detrimental to the public structures themselves, since the timetables for certain competitions are only very imperfectly correlated with recruitment needs. As a result, the pool of available successful candidates is artificially restricted and public administrations are ultimately forced to turn to recruiting non-permanent employees, i.e. contract workers, to fill vacant positions. This situation can also be seen as an indication of poor planning and anticipation in terms of recruitment. Finally, the recruitment method by competition, then aptitude list, can conceal a double brake on attractiveness. On the one hand, because of the uncertainty of being permanently appointed to a position after passing the competition (particularly in the local public service where passing a competition in no way guarantees a position at the end²) and, on the other hand, because of the criterion of geographical assignment. This second point is perceived by the new generations, who want more freedom, as an additional constraint. Being forced to take a location as a first assignment is thus felt to be an obligation and not a deliberate choice on their part. (Armand, C., 2019)

7. THE LEVEL OF REMUNERATION

Remuneration is also an explanatory cause of the loss of attractiveness of the civil service. By far the most cited by the various actors in the sector interviewed by your rapporteurs, this factor weighing negatively on public employment represents the cornerstone, or the tipping point, leading potential candidates for entry into the civil service, or agents already in post, to lose interest in it in favor of private sector jobs. The reason for this observation

is simple: for similar positions, civil service courses are very often less remunerative than private sector courses. Thus, Marie-Laure Blot notes that the salary balance is not to the advantage of the public sector: "between 2013 and 2020, the average net salary in the public sector increased by 8.83%, while it increased by 14.35% in the private sector". In practice, the salary gap impacts the decisive choice and leads, in a majority of cases, to a "talent drain" towards the private sphere, particularly in urban areas where candidates and agents have the choice of employer, and this without having strong external constraints (moving, etc.). During the plenary meeting of your delegation, organized on April 6, 2023, on the "Employer brand: what territorial strategy for local authorities?", your rapporteur Jérôme Durain considered that the issue of attractiveness for the civil service can be summed up in two key words: "meaning and money". If one of them is missing, the balance between the public and private sectors shifts in favor of the latter. In line with this reflection, Mr. Yves Charmont, General Delegate of Cap'Com, testifies that the gap recorded in terms of remuneration has widened. He also notes that this "is becoming even more significant in an inflationary context". The revaluations of the index point carried out in July 2022 (+3.5%) and in July 2023 (+1.5%), alongside the revaluation of the minimum wage, have not yet made it possible to fill the accumulated gap. Of the three sectors of the civil service, the sector most affected by the remuneration component is the territorial sector. The reason lies in the categorical structure of this civil service: the staff of local authorities and their satellites include a relatively high proportion of civil servants in category C (around 75%), i.e. the lowest-paid category. Furthermore, within this category of agents, as your delegation chair, Françoise Gatel, observes, "a significant number of municipal agents [are] on the minimum wage". (Curado, C., Goncalves, T., Brito, J.C. 2022) Consequently, this state of affairs is pulling down average levels of remuneration within local authorities.

8. CONCLUSION

We can conclude that there are several factors that hinder the interest of young people in training in local government institutions. The territorial civil service is characterized by strong competition for recruitment in jobs in demand (municipal police, social workers, executives, etc.) between communities in the same catchment area, which can adopt very different compensation schemes. low remuneration of agents as well as missions considered unattractive compared to those in the private sector. (Curado, C., Goncalves, T., Brito, J.C. 2022) Management perceived as too hierarchical The management style in the civil service is sometimes out of step with current expectations. Human resources departments, and more broadly all stakeholders in public institutions, are thus observing a change in mentalities in the medium/long term. This notable change, driven by new generations, but not only, leads civil servants to want to work in a more modern, less bureaucratic and more agile environment. Marie-Laure Blot emphasizes this upheaval in practices and notes that "while employees are [still] proud to carry out projects geared towards the future and to practice a job that makes sense, they sometimes have difficulty finding their place in a large organization". The difficulty in finding one's place is accentuated by the pyramidal nature of the organization of the civil service, at a time when more collective and horizontal decision-making systems are being favored in modern management. Despite its openness to innovative management practices, the public sector-25 - continues to be stuck with a somewhat old-fashioned and overly hierarchical image (the need to seek approval from management before being able to take the slightest initiative, for example), which it is struggling to shake off. Overall, this "lack of internal flexibility" restricts the "emergence of initiatives"¹ and leads to a "de-responsabilization" of the agent in his daily tasks, regardless of the branch of the public service. At the end of the process, the agent in office develops a feeling of robotization, in an environment that leaves him no room for maneuver. In an attempt to remedy this dehumanization of functions, several institutions, particularly local ones, are trying to break the codes in force and improve the way they view the quality of life at work. Among the processes aimed at restoring this reputation, many local authorities are trying, for example, to change working conditions and to initiate innovative practices in terms of management, internal organization or even the use of new technologies. When they are implemented, this flexibility and autonomy granted to agents constitute a way for public institutions to be more attractive on the job market. In this regard, Marie-Laure Blot emphasizes that "the balance between personal and professional life is very important. 70% of candidates [cite it] as part of their selection criteria. This phenomenon has [even] become more pronounced since the health crisis [and the increasing use of teleworking]. 58% attach [since] importance to the working environment." Since the health crisis, candidates' demands have increased in terms of work-life balance, salary, flexibility (teleworking, hours, etc.) and the meaning found in work, particularly among young graduates who are particularly attentive to their well-being in the professional environment. Management is therefore at the heart of the thinking of public organizations faced with an attractiveness problem. It is therefore not insignificant to observe that a growing number of public administrations are now training their managers to make their methods more flexible. These administrations have become aware of what Marie-Laure Blot notes in new behaviors at work: "a good understanding with management is cited by 44% of candidates as a motivating criterion for joining or leaving a company."

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