

Cultural Decentralization

A French Decentralization Model

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Abstract : The debate on centralization or decentralization is an old one in France. Settled by Napoleon I, relaunched by General De Gaulle in 1960, renewed by François Mitterrand in 1982 and recently backed up by the «Raffarin decentralisation», it can be seen that France is lavish in policies in this domain.

Although this past decade has witnessed a strong financial and institutional upsurge, stimulated both by the resoluteness of the central power and by growing dynamism of regional communities, fundamental questions still remain unanswered: Can the definition of general interest and standards be entrusted to local authorities? How can one build a real balance of power between central and peripheral organization; generally according to France history how can one build a Girondist State in a Jacobin manner?

The objectives of this paper are to analyze through the financial aspect of the cultural sector the complex relations that bind the centre and the periphery in France, to highlight the reality of the French decentralization policies mainly subjected by the “1982 Decentralization laws.”; By observing the means devoted to the cultural sector between 1980 and 1990 we will take a focus on the political game of power sharing between the central power and the regional communities.

Decentralization in French political debate is a mystical concept that covers a reality that is both simple and complex. Although the term outrightly evokes obvious connotations of simplicity, flexibility, modernity and more generally an administrative management movement spreading from the centre to the periphery, it is more difficult to propose it a rigorous concept when fundamental issues are raised, for instance: What attitudes should be adopted in the face of a regionalist or even autonomist territorial claim? Can one imagine an increasing diversification of the status of councils? Is contemporary centralism political, administrative or fiscal? Do the defence of local autonomies and European federalism go hand in hand? How can a Jacobean State be constructed in a Girondine manner?

Established by Napoleon I, revived by General De Gaulle in 1960, renewed by François Mitterrand in 1982 and recently strengthened by the «Raffarin decentralization», France is very generous with discussions on this issue, and as pointed out by Hugues Portili,¹⁾ there are divergent views, opposing policies, a lost debate and “language splutters”.²⁾ These past years and since the 1982 decentralisation law, discussions are focussed in an administrative and legal register: that of territorial organisation or management at the

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1) Hugues Portili, *Les Partis et la décentralization: la fin d'un consensus*. (Parties and decentralization: the end of a consensus.) - Pouvoirs locaux (Paris)

2) according to an expression by Francis Delpere

detriment of its political dimension as recalled by Bruno REMOND³⁾ when he writes: *“when we talk of decentralization and relationships between the State and territorial communities, we state a problem of power sharing and not a problem of administrative management. Decentralization is therefore neither an administrative nor a management problem; it is an essentially political problem.”*

The cultural sector probably best illustrates the difficulties of the evolution towards a new balance of power between central and regional organs. Although this past decade has witnessed a strong financial and institutional upsurge, stimulated both by the resoluteness of the Ministry of Culture and by the growing dynamism of regional communities, questions remain unanswered: Is the “public cultural sector” relevant? How is the State brought to intervene in such a multi-faceted domain, where the democratic drive usually derives from cultural organizations themselves?

In order to analyse cultural decentralisation in France, it is necessary to fully integrate one’s self in the political intensity, by making an analogy of the means used. Consequently, the objectives of this contribution are to analyze the complex relations that bind the center and the periphery, to describe the French peculiarity of decentralization subjected to a three-fold influence: integration into European politics, the growth of inter-communal cooperation, globalization and the assertion of the “French cultural exception” by observing the means (public spending) devoted to the cultural sector between 1980 and 1990, which was a period of active political decentralization in France.

However, before examining French public accounts, this paper first detours through the complexities of the analysis framework.

SCOPE OF ANALYSIS

The context of analysis centers around three major complexities: cultural sector characteristics, the peculiarity of French administrative structures and the complexity of the resulting centre-periphery relations.

The Cultural Sector: A Multifaceted Domain

The French cultural sector is heterogeneous both at the level of the object, the economic thought as well as its institutional approach.

According to the observations of Pierre Mouliner, the cultural object is made up of government structures as well as industrial and commercial enterprises and non-profit making associations. Each of these components has diversified sub-sectors. For

3) Bruno REMOND, Paper presented at the Paris Institute of Political Studies on the theme: Future of the local sector and decentralisation, the situation of decentralisation in France and comparison with European systems.

example, sub-sectors for music and dance for instance include opera, traditional music, contemporary compositions, music businesses, amateur music, contemporary dances, etc. In addition, this sector is expanding by embracing new domains such as design, cookery, urban arts, small-scale local handicraft, poor art, minority expressions, and scientific and technical culture. In short, one culture cannot reduce culture to a specific product.

The economic thought applied to the cultural sector also has a great variability of approaches:

Françoise Benhamou underscores the delimitation of fields of cultural economy traditionally reduced to fields of art initially excluded from the scope of observation of the economic thought. According to Alfred Marshall,⁴⁾ "it is impossible to assess objects such as paintings of the masters or rare currencies, since they are one of their kind with neither equivalent nor rival [...]. The price of sales equilibriums of such objects is just a matter of chance..." Others like Blaug⁵⁾ joined in during the development of a micro-economics, stating that "the economies of arts constitute a sort of experimentation ground for the relevance of fundamental economic concepts" The economics of culture was conducted by excluding cultural industries that are voluntarily relegated to the domain of industrial economy. All these sub-sectors however have similar modes of training.

Despite all the works relating to bureaucratic theories which, by proving the «adverse effects» question any economic public intervention, It should be noted that the dominant thinking in France sanctions public intervention in the cultural sector.

According to analyses by Pierre Lemieux, the major economic argument for the intervention of the State in cultural matters stems from the theory of "State property."⁶⁾ This refers to property of service whose consumption by some automatically renders the same quantity available for the others; and despite issues raised by the problem of the so-called "free riders", the State must intervene to supply the State property and thus meet the real preferences of individuals.

Joëlle Farchy underscores three categories of arguments:

- The insolvency of part of the demand for cultural products, which slows down the determination to undertake them, which may lead to poor production or no production at all;
- The unpredictably and unprofitably of cultural products, which leads to their disappearance or to their standardization.
- The role of cultural expenses in economic policy in general through their multiplier effects as a means of assistance to budding or declining industries.

At the institutional level Although not all cultural activities are attached to the cultural sector, this sector has had its own ministry since 1959. The organization of the sector is not limited to a collection of domains. Rather, cultural responsibilities are exercised by crosscutting the functions and objectives that are common to domains such as heritage

4) Alfred Marshall, quoted by Françoise Benhamou.

5) Blaug, quoted by Françoise Benhamou.

6) Likewise BAILLEYS S.: Public choice theory and the reform of local government in Britain: from government to governance in Public policy and administration, No. 8, 1993.

protection, artistic creation, dissemination, training, animation, research, communication and administration. The range of functions thus makes the Ministry of Culture extremely diversified in its objectives and methods.

The consequence of this is that the cultural sector has conflicting interests that complicate the understanding of the politicking therein

The French Administrative System: A Stratification of Levels

The complexity of the distribution between the State and decentralised entities lies to a large extent in the existence of several interwoven levels of administration on the same territory involved in a prohibition of the control of any council over another.

The French administrative system has no less than six institutional levels, if we include local co-operation bodies and the European Union whose directives are binding both on national authorities and on local governments, which include councils, divisions and regions. Although France is not the only European country with this administrative system, numerous disparities between communities characterize the French system.:

Each level contains a great number of communities. With a population of 57 million people, France has about 36,000 councils, which equals the number of councils in 14 other European Union countries that have a total population of 316 million people. France also has 100 divisions (including overseas divisions), 22 regions and 21 regional public establishments.

Disparities between communities: For example, 31,457 councils have less than 2000 inhabitants. The disparities are very striking within the divisions. The North is the most populated division with 2,500,000 inhabitants, while Lozère is the least populated division with 72,000 inhabitants. The Hauts de Seine division with a population of 1,391,000 inhabitants has a budget of close to 1,221 million Euro, while the budget of Lozère is 61 million Euro less. An administrative unit of such economic, financial and demographic importance has nothing in common with a number of rural divisions. The largest region has a huge population and a considerable economic potential. Such is the case with Ile de France (10.6 million inhabitants) and Rhône-Alpes (4 million inhabitants). By contrast, Franche Comté with 1 million inhabitants and Limousin with 70,000 inhabitants have more than enough financial resources. Regardless of the population, these different communities have the same regulations at each level and have a priori the same powers and the same competences.

The diagram provided in Appendix 1 shows all the complexity of the structure, as well as the control of the central government, which before the 1982 decentralization was organized around divisional officers whose preponderance was usurped by chair persons of general councils or of regional councils.⁷⁾

The 2 March 1982 law on the rights and freedoms of councils, divisions and regions, lays down the principle of free administration of decentralised entities. For the council, the statement of the principle is nothing new. Since the 5 April 1884 law, the council

7) see specially, Tobin Im, *le Préfet dans la décentralisation*, Harmattan, Paris, 1997: on how the "prefet" which main power have been tranfert to the chairman of the regional council maneuvers to keep some.

was a full-fledged territorial entity: elected by universal suffrage, the municipal council deliberates and confers execution unto the mayor who is elected from among the councillors.

For the division and the region, by contrast, the change is glaring. It is true that since 1871 the general council is elected by direct universal suffrage and manages the affairs of the division. But it was the prefect who then had executive power, living the president of the council general with mere symbolic duties. The division executive was henceforth transferred to the chairman of the general council. Finally, following the same logic, the Region was raised to a territorial entity. The municipal power outline was thus extended to the division and the Region.

The law also tends to limit State control over councils. It cancels supervision which enabled the representative of the State to exercise an a priori a control over possible acts of decentralised entities. The only control that remained was that exercised a posteriori by the duly requested administrative judge. In financial matters, it was the newly created regional audit benches that were competent to appraise the regularity of the acts.

In effect, the 1982 law complemented by those of 7 January 1983 and 22 July 1983, strived in a spirit of coherence and proximity to constitute homogenous blocks of competences depending on the dominant vocations of each level of administration:

Councils have essential competences in the field of town planning and responsibility for proximity equipment; divisions have a mission of solidarity and equalisation: they are responsible for social welfare, transportation of students outside the urban centre, roads and rural equipment; regions play a role of reflection and incentive in matters of planning, territorial development and more generally economic development. The State conserves the responsibilities of setting standards, functions of sovereignty and major economic balance.

It is however observed that the attribution of homogenous blocks of competence to each administration level proved to be difficult to implement. For instance, in the field of education, the State conserved the responsibilities of education and programming, recruitment and personnel management, each level of the administration being attributed the investment and running costs of a given level of education: primary school for councils, secondary schools for divisions, high school for regions and the university for the State. Similarly, being incapable of determining sealed blocks, the legislator strived to also organise partnerships.

The European constitution exercises a certain pressure on the action capacity of decentralised entities and on the relationships they have with the State. Councils thus appear to be fully governed by community law.

Lastly, all regional policies fall within the national and European context. If Europe and national policies decide on the liberalisation of public services, regions' room for manoeuvre shall still be reduced to going against such policies in fields that would be under their control. It can thus be seen that, as stated above, politics cannot be dissociated from finances.

National-Local: Ambiguous Relations

In France, two contradictory mechanisms of a dialectical movement define the

relations between the center and the periphery.:

The centralization of power rests on State authority, which controls policymaking in the public interest. The consequence is that the local system depends on the central government. Local authority, when it exists, is residual in the sense that the central government monopolizes politics and influences the entire nation. The local system is determined by various institutional structures and functioning modes imposed by the central government.

Specialization of policy-making: This causes the local system to influence the national political system. Either local authorities exert pressure so that the central government orientates its decisions in the interest of regions, or the central government takes the initiative to enhance local responsibilities in a bid to balance relations with the local system. The 1982 decentralization laws and subsequent laws (1984, 1985, 1987, 1992) provide examples.

Centralization in cultural matters is analyzed using the following two models:

- A “royal tradition” model where the powers that be try to celebrate their own fame through arts (political success);
- A “democratic tradition” where culture is essentially considered as public instruction or in its popular sense (open to all).

CULTURAL POLICY IN THE ERA OF DECENTRALIZATION

Within this context of extreme conceptual, institutional and political complexity, a study of cultural spending reveals, in terms of political maneuvers, different facets of cultural policy in France from 1980-1990 such as centralism, the emergence of the local and partnership co-operation.

A-Jacobin Centralism: Central Authority

A new kind of Jacobin centralism, which combined both the royal tradition model and the democratic tradition model, marked the first facet. It was characterized by huge State expenditure, personalization of the policy of public subsidies to artists, an ambitious building policy aimed at boosting the credibility of the government in office, and the use of festivals as a means of currying support for the national project.

Increase in State Expenditure

The increase in State expenditure was spectacular with the budget of the Ministry of Culture increasing fivefold from 430 million euro in 1981 to 21 100 million euro in 1993. The GDP of the Ministry also doubled from 0.09% in 1981 to 0.18% in 1993, while its relative weight in general budgetary spending by 220% from 0.46% to 1.01%.

These developments did not follow some smooth pattern. From 1982 to 1984, the rapid increases in budget created some euphoria. In 1982, the Ministry budget increased 79% over the 1981 budget. It then increased by 6.5% in 1983 and 7.5% in 1984 before rising sharply by 12.77% in 1986, an election year. However, this increase was short-lived

because in 1987 and 1988 (a period of coalition government) there was a net decrease (-10.69% in 1987 and -4.76% in 1988). With the return of the left to power, there was a slight upturn marked by a constant yearly increase: +8.75% in 1990, 11.94% in 1991, 4.49% in 1992, and 3.89% in 1993. During this period, the budget of the Ministry of Culture became the symbolic 1% of State expenditure.

This great increase in public spending on culture enabled the central government to implement an active State culture strategy, which first culminated in an increase in spending in favor of artists. A Head 14 study of the Ministry of Culture budget, which lumped together all subsidies allocated by the State for bodies and associations under the Ministry of Culture, shows that from 1981 to 1993, credits under that budget increased from 152 million euro to 530 million euro in 1993 after a historic increase in 1982 of 184%.

The increase in subsidies allocated for associations is due to the broadening of the cultural sector to include new domains. We can say that the increase in credits has encouraged a broadening of the sphere of culture. In the 1980s, the frontiers of State culture broadened to include what were previously secondary or even minor arts. The Ministry financed them indirectly through specialized associations. The following examples illustrate the point.

The Circus: Until 1979, circuses were under the Ministry of Agriculture so the Ministry could monitor the health of the animals. During the period under study, the Ministry of Culture took over supervisory authority and made circuses an integral part of culture. Thus, in 1989 the following associations, both partly funded by the State, were created in Châlons-sur-Marne: *Le centre national des arts du cirque* and the *Ecole Supérieure des arts du cirque*.

Street performance: Street performances also became an important cultural domain. Here after numerous incidents, the Ministry established the *Centre national de creation des arts de la rue* and a national documentation center managed by an association funded largely by the State.

Puppet shows: Puppet shows followed the same trend. Since the 1980s in Charleville-Mézières, an "International Institute" for Puppet Shows has existed. It is a private association that, during the period under study, was largely financed by the State.

In conclusion, we can say that because of the very flexible mechanism for subsidizing associations, the central government has been able to achieve cultural development by developing new cultural domains. We therefore find a new development trend that combines the democratic tradition model by allowing for a broadening of the cultural sphere to include popular cultural practices with the royal tradition model, which shows "the the leniency of the Prince", to freely exercises authority over culture.

Major Projects

Public investments in the cultural sector clearly indicate great plans. In fact, major projects are the result of cultural policy between 1981 and 1993. During this period, the State spent 2834 million euro on cultural projects.

In 1982, expenditures on major works amounted to 0.44 billion euro and represented less than 0.01% of GDP. Two years later, expenditures increased to 149 billion euro, which represented 0.02% of GDP. Expenditures further increased to 0.44 billion euro,

i.e. 0.05% of the GDP in 1986. Expenditures experienced a slight decrease between 1987 and 1990 before resuming their constant upward trend between 1991 and 1993 to attain 0.04% of GDP. The maximum was 456 billion euro in 1993. (The table in Appendix 2 clearly shows how the increased funding of major projects, the rapidly increased the percentage of the ministry's budget in proportion to the overall budget until it stabilized at about 1% of the target.)

Although the construction of emblematic monuments by the authorities is truly a French tradition, what differs during the period under review is the number of monuments actually constructed, e.g., the Grand Louvre, the Bastille Opera, the National Higher Music Conservatory, the Cit de la Musique, the National Library of France, etc.

Generally, in the pure royal tradition, the central government succeeded in mounting a consistent effort for the construction of exceptional monuments with popular objectives, and this contributed to selling the image of the country.

Festival as the Synthesis of Traditions

One of the strongest tools of the cultural policy was using a public festival as a means of disseminating culture through temporary yet constantly renewed enthusiastic movements. As such, the music festival rapidly became a national celebration and later went international. The music festival was followed heritage days, film festivals, etc. With the aid of such these grants, culture democratized, diversified and was well received.

The year 1989, the bicentenary of the French Revolution, was the apex of this cultural policy of popular Paris festivals. One can again notice the dichotomy of development of a popular and democratic culture in a centralized organization of both royal and Jacobin inspiration.

In terms of political power, according to François de Mazières, French cultural centralism has four main characteristics:

1. **Personalization of power:** Since Malraux, the Minister of Culture is like a father to French artists, and is significant within the cultural milieu. Malraux was a writer, Lang an "*agrégé de droit*" (had passed the *aggregation* examination in law) but above all, the director of the Nancy Festival.
2. **Constant reference to Paris:** Paris is the location of important cultural bodies, reference monuments and cultural institutions. As we shall see, this leads to a counterbalancing with the creation of several local festivals (Avignon, Bourges, La Rochelle, Angoulme, etc.).
3. **The power of State patronage:** The Ministry is the decision-making unit elevated to the power of State patronage. In effect, the central government directly manages the most part of credits earmarked for culture.
4. **The immunity of the central government:** French historical tradition considers culture as a State prerogative. As such, decisions on the construction of various monuments are rarely contested.

The Financial Emergence of Local Communities: An Ambivalent Power

The second face of French cultural policy in the 1980s is the emergence and

counterbalancing of local institutions to national institutions.

Financial observation parallel Jacobin centralism and show an increasing influence by local communities in cultural matters. A report on cultural expenses commissioned by the Ministry of Culture in 1993 revealed that 49.80% of expenses came from local communities and 50.7% came from the central government. This included 19% for the Ministry of Culture alone (See table in Appendix 3.).

Councils spend 5 billion euro on cultural activities, which is approximately 11% of all public spending. In contrast, the divisions spend only 0.9 billion euro and regions less than 0.4 billion. (See table in Appendix 4) Large towns expend the most per capita on culture; 47 towns of more than 80,000 inhabitants expend 190 euro per inhabitant, which is 12.9% of their overall budget and twice the expenses of towns with less than 20 to 30,000 inhabitants. In such cities, the distribution of expenditure on culture is as follows: live performances (31.4%), music and arts schools (18.62%), libraries (11.3%) and multipurpose animation (9%).

The financial observation of expenses does not make it possible to assert a real decentralization to local communities. In fact, the cultural domain when compared with other fields of State intervention is one of the rare sectors where decentralization was not a product of central government intervention but rather the result of local initiatives asserted by financial strength. The real contribution of decentralization was the confirmation by law that granted local communities the right to act independently if the expenses were borne locally. The local communities are making full use of this right, and this has produced an ambivalent power relationship between the central and local authorities that at times leads to competition.

Activities marking the bicentenary of the French Revolution are an outstanding illustration of the impressive financial contribution local communities made their own celebrations in conjunction with the central government's contribution. The budget set aside by the general councils was about 51% of the total budget allocated to the mission of the bicentenary.

It is as if in the absence of decentralization of resources, local communities seized the opportunity offered by the decentralization law to stage a resistance - or even a counter attack - against the central government, which was weakened by a drastic drop in its financial resources and by the burden of property management of major public works.

Cooperation and Partnership: Shared Power

The third face of French cultural policy is that of cooperation. With the emergence of financial power in local communities, towns are becoming full-time actors in public policy. Although cultural decentralization is not extensive, Pierre Mouliner describes the overall weight of communities in their relationship as, "small-scale decentralization and broad-based cooperation." Public cultural actions now operate in cooperation with one another. The public cultural milieu is a polycentric in that the central government may thus depend on its decentralized services to prefer cooperation among the various public actors through "cultural development conventions." Between 1982 and 1995, the government signed more than 1700 conventions. Furthermore, towns implemented convention strategies that varied from town to town, adapted their urban projects and seized the

financial opportunities offered by the State. As such, several contractual formulas emerged over the years such as the cinema convention (1989) and the plastic arts city convention (1993), which the Ministry of Culture still finances.

The year 1990 ushered in an era of significant change that extended the cooperation policy.

In 1994, for the first time the cultural dimension was integrated into the overall town planning policy. The principle was that of a gradual re-balancing of equipment and cultural offerings between Paris and the regions with three main objectives: redistributing cultural resources across the country, developing proximity cultural offerings and validating the wealth of regional heritage. This gave rise to dozens of operations referred to as "major regional projects," and the funding of numerous proximity apparatuses to materialize the political will. For example, in 1998 the town of Dijon took advantage of these mechanisms to fund an auditorium planned since 1989.

In 1995, the law on territorial orientation and development established a cultural equipment plan.

In 1997, a partnership register in the form of multi-annual objective contracts funded by the central government was negotiated as a decentralized service.

With such partnerships, the tutelary State is eroding, although not without resistance. In political terms, the central government is determined to better evaluate local realities while preserving control over local cultural policies.

CONCLUSION

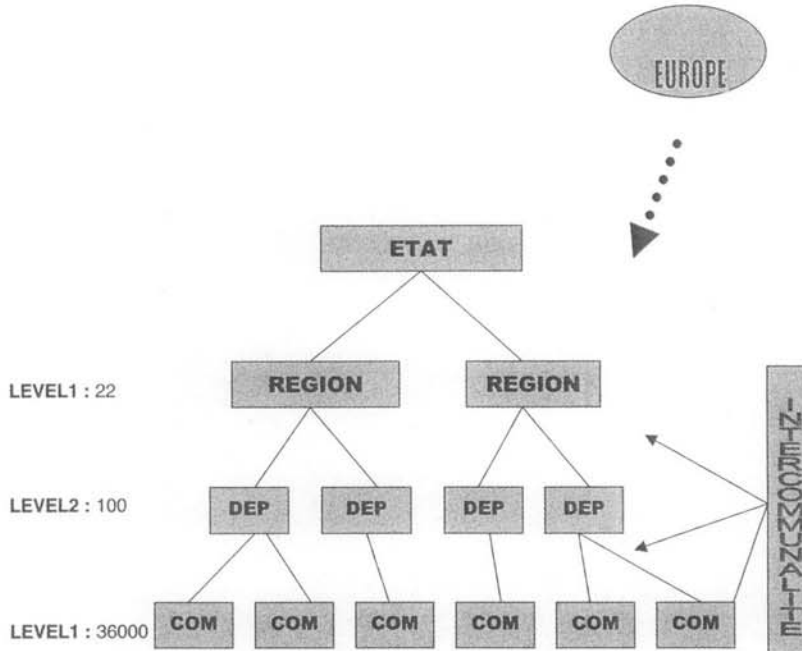
The French model of cultural decentralization is pragmatic in that we find both the Jacobin centralization of local power and cooperation. It thus escapes the linear evolution of historical analyses, and it seems too early to announce the end of cultural Jacobism.

Depending on the political maneuvers, it is still possible to reconstruct a centralized cultural orientation by conquering new domains and substantially increasing the budget of the Ministry. On the other hand, the pre-emption of the current cultural achievements of local authorities by the central government appears to be uneasy. Instead, with the enhancement of cooperation structures between communities (inter-communality, etc.), the central government is increasingly called into a partnership with specific power sharing.

APPENDIXES

APPENDIX 1

structure administrative: un empilement de niveau sous la double influence de l'Europe et de l'intercommunalité



DEP: Département

COM: Commune

APPENDIX 2

Evolution of the proportion of the Budget of the Ministry of Culture in the overall State budget

| | 1980 | 1981 | 1982 | 1983 | 1984 | 1985 | 1986 | 1987 | 1988 | 1989 | 1990 | 1991 |
|--------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Total | 0.51 | 0.47 | 0.76 | 0.79 | 0.84 | 0.86 | 0.93 | 0.86 | 0.81 | 0.86 | 0.86 | 0.94 |
| Major projects exclusive | 0.49 | 0.46 | 0.74 | 0.74 | 0.75 | 0.70 | 0.70 | 0.71 | 0.73 | 0.76 | 0.73 | 0.77 |

Source: MCC/DAG/DEP

APPENDIX 3

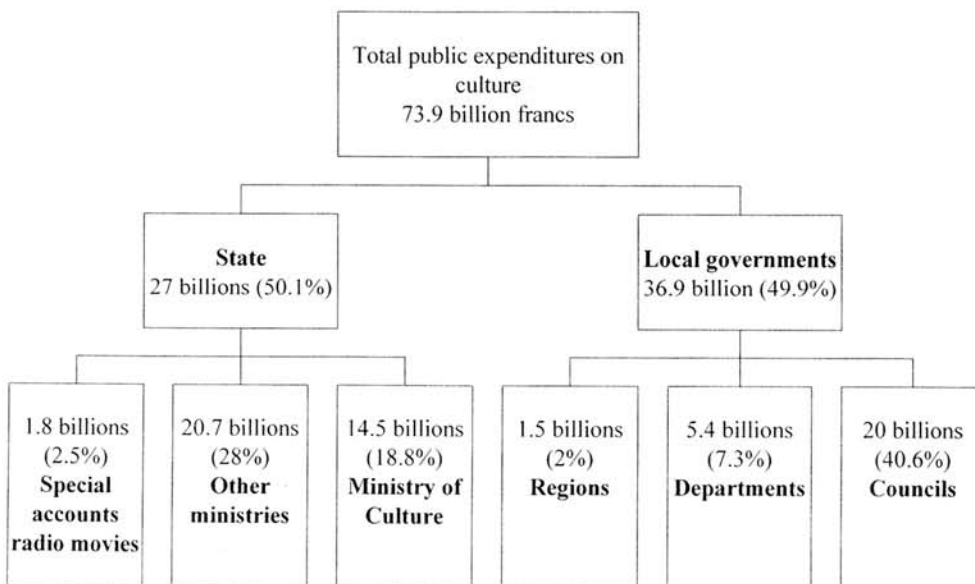
Expenditure on culture by local governments in 1990

| | TOTAL EXPENSES | | |
|--------------------|-----------------|-----------------------|-------------------|
| | Millions Francs | Francs per inhabitant | % Share of budget |
| Regions | 1165 | 20.6 | 2.4 |
| Recurrent expenses | 658 | 11.6 | 3.3 |
| Capital expenses | 507 | 9.9 | 1.8 |
| Departments | 4075 | 74.8 | 2.5 |
| Recurrent expenses | 2651 | 48.7 | 2.6 |
| Capital expenses | 1424 | 26.1 | 2.3 |
| Councils | 18648 | 731.9 | 9.8 |
| Recurrent expenses | 14273 | 560.2 | 10.9 |
| Capital expenses | 4375 | 171.7 | 7.4 |
| Paris | 1640 | 761 | 6.6 |
| Recurrent expenses | 1331 | 618.2 | 7.3 |
| Capital expenses | 309 | 1436 | 4.8 |

Sources: MCC/DEP

APPENDIX 4

Comparison of public spending between State and Local governments 1993



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