

## Reconciling flexibility and security at local level

### What forms of social regulation for inter-organisational bodies?

#### Introduction

In order to confront the increased demands for flexibility and adaptability linked to the globalisation of economic exchanges, contemporary businesses are constantly testing new forms of work organisation and of workforce mobilisation (Marchington *et al.*, 2004; Cooke *et al.*, 2004). Numerous managerial measures are emerging to respond in innovative ways to the need for flexibility and security expressed as much by employers as by workers. These new practices, the local compromises that some people have termed flexicurity (Wilthagen and Tros, 2004), are the fate of all the countries whose regulatory frameworks have been established in reference to forms of employment put into practice in a context of mass and standardised production (Regalia, 2006).

One of the striking features of these emerging practices is that they are frequently established at an inter-organisational level, within business partnerships or mixed partnerships (public/private; profit/non-profit, etc.), within regions, within labour market areas, etc. This development of inter-organisational partnerships as a privileged form of organising businesses and co-ordinating activities is inscribed in a dynamic of a general restructuring of value chains within a globalised economy. Amongst other factors, the fluidification of exchanges linked to the development of technologies in effect enables the boundaries of a business company to be more easily rethought.

Furthermore, in a context of decentralisation and of local forms of regulation becoming increasingly more valued (Supiot, 1999; Commissariat Général du Plan, 2000), inter-organisational partnerships are more and more often presented as the relevant perimeter for putting into practice new social regulations. We are here consequently witnessing a genuine institutional bricolage, over the course of which social actors mobilize and use 'whatever means are at hand' (Levi-Strauss, 1960) and the resources available to them, rerouting them away from their primary purpose to construct new institutions (Koenig, 1996; Campbell, 2004). In this respect, these emerging compromises constitute a particularly interesting source of institutional innovation in terms of social regulation. Lawrence *et al.* (2002) also note that inter-organisational collaboration can be a source of change within institutional fields through the generation of proto-institutions, in other words new practices, regulations and technologies which transcend a particular collaborative relationship and can become new institutions if they are sufficiently disseminated. This 'micro source' of 'macro change' has nonetheless been little studied until now, research into the subject of institutional change being more focused on the 'field level.'

Let us nevertheless stress that for the most part these new arrangements appear in a clandestine manner, growing on the margins or on the cracks of the existing legal framework. This is the case notably for *umbrella company services*, which allow a professional to act as a freelance person whilst benefiting from the status of a salaried employee and the rights which go with it. An unofficial and forbidden practice in Belgium, it is on the way to being framed by French law. We also observe practices such as *skill pooling* and *co-sourcing* which, profiting from loopholes in the law, enable a company to make its workers available to another business, either part time or for the duration of a project. To be noted is also the

development of employers' pools, a system for pooling a workforce which, thanks to a Belgian legal framework which is quite restrictive, is sometimes put into practice without any form of formalisation.

In certain cases, new compromises are put into place to the satisfaction of all the stakeholders, despite their taking place beyond existing regulations. In others, notably when the power relationships between the actors are too asymmetrical, they end up in unbalanced situations which are untenable in the long term because they are too precarious for the actors concerned. One of the major issues of these new compromises is in effect that they frequently involve a triangulation of the employment relationship (employer, worker, user) with a corollary dissociation of economic and social responsibilities (Sobczak, 2003) which risks placing the worker in precarity. Traditional social regulation constructed on the basis of bilateral employment relations proves to be powerless as far as framing these practices is concerned (Supiot, 1999; Regalia, 2006; Berns *et al.*, 2007).

It is thus important to identify new signposts so that the emergent practices, the self regulation of the actors within the labour market, are not synonymous with a legal black hole, and allow labour market regulation to evolve whilst preserving the public interest. Up until now little research work has centred on this particular dimension – micro, inter-organisational and emergent – of social regulation. In the face of these gaps, this article offers some elements of a response to the following question: at an inter-organisational level, what methodological stances should be privileged in order to reach flexicurity compromises which preserve the public interest? In other words it is a question of identifying the modalities of putting together both balanced and durable social compromises in these new action perimeters.

In this perspective, on the basis of the very rich results of research-action work carried out within the framework of an experimental and participative project, this paper offers three pathways in terms of reaching desirable compromises, that is to say new modes of regulation established from the standpoint of the public interest. The first pathway aims at satisfying the divergent interests of the stakeholders in the compromise within a widened perimeter. The second concentrates on the process of institutionalising the compromise, which confers on it a structuring role. The third and final pathway in fact transverses the first two: it stresses the crucial role of third parties in the process of satisfying the stakeholders and in institutionalising compromise.

After having specified, in the first part of this paper, the objectives, the methodology and the stakes of the research-action project from which we draw our proposals, we will in the next section offer details concerning the case of the multi-active workers in the Trilogi business company, a pilot project aimed at reconciling flexibility and security which we initiated and provided follow-up for. In the third part of the paper we will propose an analysis grid constituted of various descriptive variables of flexicurity compromises put into practice at inter-organisational level. We will explain how this tool was conceived in the context of our research-action project and then show how it can be used to describe and provide follow-up for processes of social innovation, in the light of our multi-activity case. The fourth and final part of our paper will present the methodological stance we propose in terms of achieving new balanced and long lasting social compromises at the micro-economic level. It will stress its particular advantages and its limits.

## 1. Understanding flexicurity in experimenting with it

In the field of studies of new forms of social regulation, the research stream concerning flexicurity is generating growing interest in the academic world as well as amongst political actors, social partners, company managers, etc. This approach is defined as ‘a political strategy which attempts, in a synchronic and deliberate manner, on the one hand to increase the flexibility of the labour market, the organisation of work and collective work relationships, and on the other to increase job security and social protection, in particular for groups placed in precarity in and out of the labour market’ (Wilthagen and Rogowski, 2002). The supporters of flexicurity consider that it constitutes an innovative framework within which to reform the labour market in a win-win manner and with a view to preserving the public interest. Here we will discuss neither the appropriateness nor the pertinence of such reforms. Nonetheless we note that innovative practices in terms of reconciling the needs of flexibility and security are emerging and spreading, in particular at inter-organisational level. It is thus important to think through the ways in which they can respond to the objectives and expectations of their stakeholders in a sustainable and economically and socially responsible way.

Beyond their generally normative and ideological nature, current research work on flexicurity reveals a major limitation: its lack of empirical basis and of practicability. If flexicurity is useful as a conceptual basis and as an overall framework for guiding thinking – in the sense that it allows the thinking through of new forms of continuity (notably that of social rights) in an environment more and more characterised by discontinuity (notably that of professional career paths) – it remains at this stage an ‘empty concept’, non operational as such because not equipped with tools. The notion must thus be enriched by other work, so as to design the tools necessary to give concrete form to the economically and socially responsible strategies of flexicurity and to make them available to actors on the ground.

It is that gap that our work aims at filling, in trying to identify the conditions for institutionalising new social compromises at the level of inter-organisational partnerships. It in effect seems to us pertinent to articulate around usual macro-economic thinking on flexicurity a deeper analysis of the practices of reconciling the needs of flexibility and security put into practice at the micro-economic level. Rather than inscribing ourselves within an a priori established framework which would probably lead us to reproduce the prevailing normativity, we have chosen to pay attention to that which, in local arrangements, contributes to pushing the more general regulation of the labour market in the direction of maintaining the public interest. We postulate that the expected changes at this level cannot be brought about only by putting into practice macro-economic strategic policies: the actors’ effective practices, which can be observed appearing in a reactive and emergent way at the micro-economic level, aimed at different sections of the population, including ‘strategic’ workers, themselves also contribute to developing forms of compromise.

In order to analyse these effective practices emerging at the level of inter-organisational partnerships we have privileged a qualitative methodology, based on pinpointing, stimulating and providing follow-up for experiments in reconciling flexibility and security. We carried out fieldwork within the framework of a research-action project financed by Article 6 of the

European Social Fund (a budget line dedicated to anticipating and managing restructurations), of which we were the co-ordinators and which ran from 2006 to 2008.<sup>1</sup>

Our methodology offers several original features. First of all it sees itself as critical and opts for a differentiated positioning in comparison with the dominant trends in research on flexicurity. As stated earlier, we try to dispense with the blinkers that the framework developed around the notion of flexicurity could form. We do that by focusing on the flexibility and security compromises emerging at the micro-economic level, within partnerships with various perimeters – business partnerships, public/private mixed partnerships, regional partnerships etc, whether or not they can be given a flexicurity label, considered successful, or judged balanced and sustainable.

Next, if the analysis includes data springing from the pinpointing and observation of existing compromises, the richness of our methodology resides above all in its experimental character. In effect, it seemed to us that one of the best methods of identifying the mechanisms for reaching new compromises in flexicurity and making them durable was to experiment, through pilot projects, with the compromise's emergence and its being put into practice. These pilot experiments consisted of providing the stimulus for and following-up innovative practices in reconciling flexibility and security in two industrial reconversion regions: the Liège labour pool in Belgium and the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region in France. In parallel with the identification of existing practices, which stimulated our creativity in designing the pilot projects, we also noted the flexibility and security needs of the economic and social actors in the two regions and, with their collaboration, imagined, put into practice and/or evaluated new reconciliation systems in various types of partnerships, with varied success. Amongst these experiments let us note the conception of a flexpool in the logistics sector, the creation of job pools between small and medium sized enterprises which share support functions, and an economic interest group composed of social economy businesses aiming to pool their respective constraints of flexibility and security, or further still the follow-up support and evaluation of a 'reverse company' scheme put into practice by a large steel company in order to secure the professional end-of-career paths of those of its workers who could not be retrained.

Finally this experimental work was carried out in a participative manner. Within the framework of this European project we mobilised various stakeholders in the local labour markets: companies of various kinds, temporary work federations, workers representatives, public and private socio-professional insertion and training organisations, local community groups with responsibilities for regional redeployment, chambers of commerce, etc. Our objective was to avoid 'desk based work' in order to suggest a theorisation of the conditions of the institutionalisation of 'desirable' flexicurity compromises, based on the experience and mental representations of those primarily concerned by these compromises, and which are socially legitimate because anchored in the actors' practices. We thus involved these varied stakeholders in two 'regional partnerships' which we brought together many times over the whole of the project's two year span. We collaborated with these partners at every stage of the project, from the identification of existing practices to the designing, the follow-up support and evaluation of pilot projects, from the analysis of the data collected to the drawing up of an analysis grid of flexicurity compromises and to the identification of the conditions of a balanced and sustainable flexicurity. The theorisation work was carried out in an abductive

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<sup>1</sup> 'Flexicurity' Projet, coordinated by LENTIC (based at the University of Liège (Belgium) HEC-Management School with its partners, IAE (Lille, France), OSA (based at the University of Tilburg (Holland), the Fondation Emergences (France) and the Fondation André Benard (Belgium); see [www.flexicurity.org](http://www.flexicurity.org).

manner, through repeated movements between practice and theory allowing for meaning to be given to observations coming from the ground.

## **2. An example of an emergent compromise: the case of Trilogi's multi-active workers**

The conditions for institutionalising balanced and sustainable compromises which we will suggest later on in this article have been identified by going back and forth between observation, experimentation and referring to the existing literature on the subject. In this section we will describe one of the emergent practices which we provided follow-up support for in the context of this European research-action project. It has as its point of departure the income insecurity faced by the warehouse workers of the Trilogi business company, due to their atypical working conditions.

Trilogi is the European hub of a transnational freight express air transport business company. Its activity is heavily restricted by the specificities of the logistics profession. This organisation's central activity, at the heart of an international network operating on a 'just in time' process, consists of receiving thousands of parcels from numerous European countries and ensuring that they are sorted out overnight so that they can be delivered to their final recipients the next morning. At the centre of a process involving multiple entities, the company is subject to very strict time objectives, the meeting of which is of prime importance from a financial point of view. Each minute late is counted in thousands of lost Euros: every delay in delivering the parcels means paying compensation to the clients.

Working conditions are particularly difficult in such a context: the work is carried out almost exclusively at night, within a framework of atypical contracts where part time is the rule. The majority of the staff, in other words around 1100 people out of the 1500 who make up the company, work from 23.00 to 03.00 in the morning, or from midnight to 04.00, five times a week, or twenty hours a week. Moreover, the nature of the warehouse tasks and sorting out the parcels, humdrum and tiresome, also conditions the hiring of a very poorly qualified and multicultural workforce which it proves very complex to manage.

The organisation of Trilogi's logistical activity can be termed atypical rather than flexible. In effect, whilst strongly constrained, the volume of activity involved in the nightly reception, sorting and sending of parcels is nonetheless completely plannable. Trilogi moreover experiences peaks of activity, but these are seasonal and also predictable. That does not prevent Trilogi from voicing a pressing need to secure its labour force supply. In such a context the company negotiated, in advance of setting up at the site of the regional airport, an agreement with the trade union organisations. This compromise was made formal through a convention signed by the different stakeholders, with the support of the local political authorities. In exchange for the flexibility required by its business activity, it offers its workers open ended contracts: consequently 90% of the workers benefit from an open ended contract, the company employs very few interim workers and the seasonal temporary workers are hired on fixed-term contracts. In thus playing the worker loyalty card, Trilogi kills two birds with one stone, as it provides security for its workers as well as securing its own labour supply. The workers in effect appreciate the open-ended contract they are provided with. They also value the predictability of their night shifts and the fact that this work offers them long free time periods during the day. On the other hand, they all voice a need for greater income security, whilst if the salary paid for these twenty hours a week is considered a proper one, it is not enough to live on, and even less in terms of supporting a whole family. Yet the majority of these workers are foreign born and/or come from disadvantaged backgrounds, and are very

often the only ones who provide for an extended family. This is why a good number of them devote their free time during the day to further paid activity, sometimes as a salaried employee or a freelance worker, sometimes in the form of undeclared work.

Trilogi seized the opportunity of an inquiry into the social climate, arranged by the group to which it belongs, to ask our centre to take in hand the drawing up, administering and the statistical analysis of a section of a questionnaire specifically dedicated to the particular problematic of reconciling flexibility and security their workers were confronted with. It more specifically wanted to examine the question of an extra job. The questions asked on this subject aimed at objectivising the needs of the workers in terms of additional work, and to define the type of aid that the workers would want, if necessary. The questionnaire was distributed to 1172 of the company's workers, of every type of status, and had a response rate of 67%, in other words 785 respondents.

The results of the questionnaire confirm the existence of a need in terms of additional work. In effect, 81% of the respondents consider that an extra job is necessary when an operator works part time, and 22% of the respondents declared that they did an extra job. The need expressed touches both on the necessity of doing an additional job and on the desire for help in the matter: 76% of the respondents consider that Trilogi should help the people who are looking for an additional job and 67% amongst them would want to benefit from this assistance were Trilogi to set it up. It is to be noted nonetheless that the desire for such aid is not felt to the same extent according to the job function practiced. It is mainly the manual workers (over 80% of them) who express this need.

In light of the size of the phenomenon of additional work and of the need expressed, we refined the data through 15 qualitative interviews carried out with multi-active workers, which aimed at grasping the situation's complexity and at testing different forms of possible response on the part of the company. The analysis we carried out on this basis showed that for a same profile of responses the needs and expectations vary strongly according to individuals. We observed that these needs differ according to the vagaries of the workers' existence, such as changes in their family situation, but also and above all the greater or lesser 'priority' nature of the job at Trilogi for those employed there. In effect for some this job is considered as supplementary to a main or developing activity, and seen as transitional. For others the job at Trilogi constitutes their main activity, topped up with something on the side, and these workers wish to keep this job as long as possible and even to increase the number of hours worked. For all of them nonetheless the different security providing mechanisms that Trilogi could put in place for its workers must remain absolutely optional. If some think that Trilogi has a responsibility to its workers, others consider that the organisation of this 'security' is a matter for the private domain and that the employer cannot and should not interfere with it.

These qualitative interviews enabled us to discover that around thirty of the workers combine part time work at Trilogi with working part time at the PiecElec company, whose activity peak takes place each day between 17.00 and 21.00, in other words just before Trilogi's activity peak. PiecElec is part of a global group which distributes electronic, electrical and computer components. The Belgian unit manages distribution for the whole of Europe. More than 400,000 orders leave each day, destined for every type of client. At the moment the activity is organised on a daily and nightly basis, with a large peak between 17.00 and 21.00, linked to the constraints of having to deliver within 24h. Around a third of the workforce works part time (half or three quarter time) and is mobilised during this high activity time slot.

The company is growing, however: investments are planned which should lead to the company increasing its part time workforce.

This combining of activity between Trilogi and PiecElec at present takes place on a completely informal basis, on the sole initiative of workers who are trying to reach a level of income equivalent to a full time post. This 'compromise' also allows the workers to organise their workday in a continuous fashion, and thus to keep a large portion of time available for rest and private activities, which constitutes an important factor of security from the point of view of the worker. Nonetheless the informal nature of this arrangement generates pernicious effects and risks for the worker as much as for his employers, all the more so when the employers are not informed of this combination: workers' tiredness, the difficulty of working extra hours at PiecElec, difficulties in attending training sessions before the shift at Trilogi, difficulties in managing accidents and work incapacity, administrative complexity linked to a single worker having two different types of work contract, a drop in safety at work in the two companies, etc.

The involvement of Trilogi and workers' representatives in our European Flexicurity project gave us the opportunity to objectivise the situation and the respective needs. Now better informed as to the risks and expectations linked to this state of affairs, but also concerning the benefits they could discover in developing and framing this 'sharing' of workers (insofar as they cannot offer more part time positions), they were open to the idea of a support follow-up of this emergent compromise within the context of the project's pilot activities. We thus mobilised the different stakeholders – Trilogi, PiecElec, workers' representatives at the two companies, as well as managers from other companies having manifested an interest in part time workers – and developed the analysis of needs and expectations of the diverse actors gathered together within the pilot project. Once the data was available to everyone and validated we explored three pathways: (1) the combining of a part time salaried employee contract with freelance work; (2) the combining of two salaried employee contracts; (3) the creation of a job pool association by the two companies (and possibly other partners) which would hire the workers and share them between its members. We put these scenarios to the different partners, in order to evaluate them, to choose between one or more formulae and to put them into practice.

The process was nonetheless slowed and then blocked by two events which constitute significant brakes on the project: on the one hand a 'wildcat' strike at Trilogi, very badly received by the company's management, which has consequently decided that it cannot carry on, in parallel with negotiations with the same union actors, a proactive and innovating discussion; on the other hand the departure of the two human resources managers at Trilogi and at PiecElec, and the arrival of a new CEO at Trilogi, imbued with a maximisation of profit logic which is not very compatible with the socially responsible step which had just been initiated. These changes in casting have required and continue to require new work in raising awareness and mobilising the actors, made all the more difficult by the situation of the present crisis. These events also make necessary the task of 'relegitimising' our action plan as an external contributor, a task which we are engaged in as we write these lines.

### **3. The emergence of a Flexicurity analysis framework**

The analysis of this attempt to reconcile flexibility and security put into practice by the Trilogi workers has been carried out at the same time as examining data gathered from the diverse 'flexicurity' practices which have been inventoried, as well as from other pilot projects designed and followed-up within the framework of the European project. This work of analysing and evaluating has been undertaken collectively, in co-operation with the stakeholders of the practices themselves and with the actors of the labour market brought together within the 'regional partnerships' responsible for the project's support back-up. This research-action dynamic has permitted various useful variables to be identified in order to portray the arrangements observed: it was a question of describing flexibility and security characteristics, of detailing the process having led to the emergence of the practice, or even to its becoming formalised and transferred into other contexts, and also of objectivising the evaluation of the more or less desirable character of the practices studied.

This work gave rise to the identification of around thirty variables. Beyond the dimensions offered in the academic literature on Flexicurity – notably the synchronic and deliberate nature of the process (Wilthagen & Rogowski, 2002), the diversity of the actors involved over the course of the theorization process generated a multitude of analytical categories. This was due to the diversity of the respective mental representations of what a flexicurity practice which maintains the public interest actually is. The particular stakes and interests of the categories of the actors involved also played an important role. However, this heterogeneous ensemble consisted of numerous redundancies and was sprinkled with value judgements. It was the repeated going back and forth between groundwork and theorization work which has enabled a purge of this inventory in order to arrive at the analysis grid we present below. This characterization work offers a description of arrangements structured around polarized dimensions, which have the benefit of bringing to light the diversity of the effective and practical modalities of reconciling flexibility and security. These are sometimes just the opposite of the prescriptions made by a normative literature which only makes provision for some of these modalities.

<b>VARIABLE</b>	<b>DESCRIPTION</b>
<b>Deliberate/ Emergent</b>	Voluntary negotiation, in reference to clearly expressed needs and accepted by the parties <i>v.</i> gradual or recurring adjustments, in reference to needs which appear progressively
<b>Two sided participation</b>	Degree of respect for the principle of voluntary commitment in putting into place a compromise for all the parties concerned
<b>Inclusive/ Selective</b>	Involvement of all the stakeholders in the employment relationship at every stage of the process leading to the compromise <i>v.</i> reduced and/or selective involvement
<b>With/ Without third party intervention</b>	The level and modalities of third party intervention in the process of the compromise's conception (advice, cognitive reframing, mobilization, follow-up support, regulation) and of its governance
<b>Generic/ Specific</b>	Compromise applied uniformly to all the members of one of the negotiating groups <i>v.</i> compromise responding to specific problematics expressed by an individual or restricted group
<b>Evolving/ Static</b>	Possibility of adapting and enriching the compromise over the course of its existence <i>v.</i> Rigidity of the negotiated compromise
<b>Formalised/ Informal</b>	Compromise based on an official agreement between the stakeholders (explicit, documented, accessible) <i>v.</i> informal agreement
<b>Means of regulation</b>	Existence or otherwise of a system of supervision or sanctioning linked to the compromise (based on cultural norms, interdependence between the partners, collective conventions, rules and regulations)
<b>Consistent/ Inconsistent</b>	Consistent or dispensatory link-up of the content of the compromise in relation to other levels of regulation

This analysis allows for the field of the possible to be opened up, the laying down of signposts and the mapping of what is observed, rather than only considering flexicurity to be what corresponds to the pre-established definition. Nonetheless, this work, which to begin with was purely descriptive, progressively discovered for itself an evaluative dimension. The participative process of the co-construction of the grid gave rise to debate and negotiation between the stakeholders in the pilot projects and between the members of a 'regional partnership'. The characterization of practices could not in effect be separated from an assessment of them, itself highly dependent on respective mental representations and individual interests. The choice and formulation of variables, as well as their description and evaluation, were the result of an agreement on a characterisation of what is current, capable of transcending particular interests. If we take the example of the category 'Formalised', the stakes were thus to find a formulation which transcends the fear of bureaucracy expressed by the employers, and the need for an officialisation and documentation of the agreement expressed by the workers' representatives.

The next process carried out in collaboration with these various actors is to find agreement on what, according to the context in which it is inscribed, can be considered as a desirable Flexicurity arrangement. It is in fact a question of identifying the action levers which allow for an increase in the 'desirability' of one or another practice of reconciling flexibility and security. The conversion of analysis variables into levers of 'desirability' seems to us to proceed from a double legitimacy, in the sense that it rests on a solid empirical base and on an interaction between the social partners involved. We do not here claim to be free of any form

of normativity, but we propose a normativity constructed with the actors, on the basis of the realities on the ground, and not on the basis of ideological premises. It is in effect important to go beyond a purely speculative and theoretical normativity, anchored on an ideal case vision of a regulation of the labour market decreed a priori, in order to reach a normativity which is at the same time empirical, because constructed on the observation of concrete realities, and pragmatic, in the sense that it is orientated towards action (Dorf et Sabel, 1998).

This ensemble of variables thus constitutes a tool enabling guidance for the actions of the labour market actors faced with the problematic of reconciling the needs of flexibility and security, and who wish to maintain the public interest. The diverse polarised dimensions must not nevertheless be understood in a Manichean manner, giving value to one of the poles to the detriment of the other, but more as pointers allowing the arrangements to be finely analysed and nuanced. They indicate an ideal to be worked towards, without ruling out compromises which do not meet the whole ensemble of conditions.

In order to give our remarks a more concrete character we will now apply our tool to the multi-activity situation which a certain number of the Trilogi workers are confronted with. We will first of all characterise the existing arrangement in the light of our analysis variables. We will then see how we can put the latter to use to provide follow-up support in order to push this emergent practice in the direction of a more balanced and long lasting compromise.

The multi-activity solution put into practice by the Trilogi workers is purely **emergent**: faced with the necessity of topping up and securitising their income, the Trilogi workers acted in an autonomous and spontaneous manner, and looked for additional activities in various forms (salaried employment, freelance work, undeclared work). It is also not very **inclusive**, as it is the result of individual and autonomous bricolage activities, which need neither the involvement nor the agreement of other parties. The employers concerned are not even necessarily informed of their workers' practices. In this case we cannot thus speak of **two sided participation**.

It is furthermore to be observed that as things stand now, the compromise put into place is essentially based on individual initiative. The solutions chosen are diversified and specific to the workers who put them into practice, even though there are a number of them who feel the need to secure their income in combining several activities. This compromise is thus **specific**. We finally note that this multi-activity is subject to no form of **formalisation**: the employers concerned are hardly aware of it. The corollary of this informal character is that no system of **regulation** has been put in place.

The multi-activity solutions practiced by the workers are in essence **evolving** and opportunistic, because they are modified according to the needs and restrictions of the latter, as well as by the job and activity opportunities offered by the regions' employers and prime contractors. Nonetheless the various stakeholders express the wish for change towards a step which is more **deliberate, inclusive and formalised**.

The workers as well as their employers in effect note that the current situation consists of numerous pernicious effects. The solution found by the workers to secure their income makes other dimensions precarious and insecure, such as their health and work-life balance. The fatigue and stress linked to reconciling various constraints are mentioned by all the multi-active workers. The employers also find that tired and stressed workers could represent a danger to themselves and their colleagues. They also point out the problems they encounter in

terms of co-ordination. The rigid timetable connected to combining two jobs makes the company insecure and constitutes a brake on efficient and flexible production.

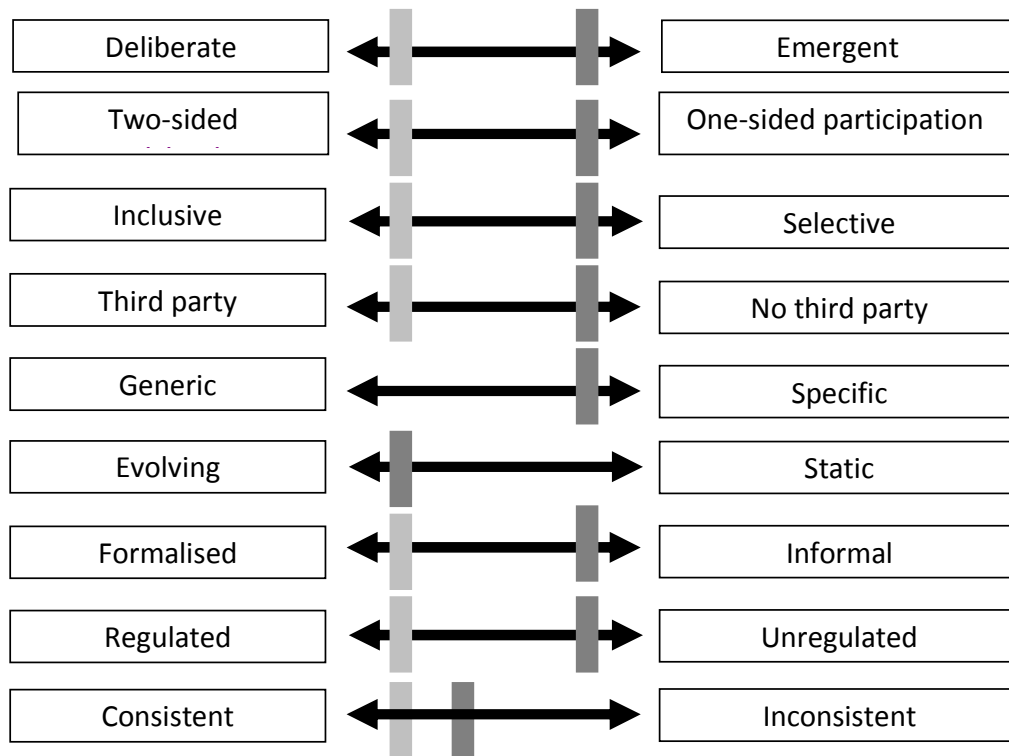
These actors have thus realized the usefulness of involving a **third party**, at the very least to analyse the mental representations, needs and stakes involved in a more systematic manner, from which sprang Trilogi's appeal to our research centre. The results of this analysis bear witness to the human resources managers involved becoming aware of the issues and becoming progressively actively engaged, thus gradually meeting the criteria of a **two sided participation**. Nonetheless, these results also plead in favour of an increased involvement on the part of management and union representatives, as well as an extension of the perimeter to other companies, in order to be able to deploy the multi-activity system on a wider scale. Our role as a **third party** has thus extended to the mobilisation of various stakeholders and to the conception of various scenarios in terms of the organisation of combinations and partnerships. This has constituted the first step taken in the direction of a more **deliberate** and **inclusive** dynamic, but also of an increased structuring, **formalisation** and **regulation** of practice. Previously, the absence of the employers' involvement made any **regulation** impossible. It can nonetheless be observed that they were gradually brought around to exchange information – for example to make the co-ordination of different shifts easier – and that they were indeed beginning to put in place a form of **regulation** of the system, which it is henceforth a question of developing.

Furthermore, the compromise will allow for a greater maintenance of the public interest in the sense that it will be possible to make it more **generic**, in other words it will become an option, or even a right, which can be activated optionally by every worker, and not only on the initiative of a handful of workers who are shrewder and more resourceful than their colleagues.

We should also note that current solutions, whilst shaky, are consistent with the existing legal framework, apart obviously from moonlighting. The different scenarios mentioned must themselves take into account this necessity for **consistency** with existing regulations. One of the formulae suggested, the 'job pool association', allows member companies to carry out a sharing of workers in a flexible and secure manner, in giving the latter a single full time and open-ended job contract. Nevertheless, the legal framework which in Belgium underpins the setting up of such associations obliges the latter to only employ long term unemployed people, who do not correspond to the profile of multi-active workers to whom we are trying to offer security. Through the work of raising the awareness of public authorities that it involves, the experimental and pilot framework of our project could nonetheless allow the non 'orthodox' job pool association that Trilogi and PiecElec could create to be made consistent. We are consequently carrying out lobbying work, targeting the ministers concerned.

If this 'adapted' job pool association formula seems to bring the diverse stakeholders to the discussion table, it however involves the employers officially committing themselves and formalising the systems of interaction and sharing. Yet the changes in casting that have taken place at the moment when a decision needs to be taken have stopped the dynamic in its tracks. Trilogi's new CEO and the new human resource managers at Trilogi and PiecElec need to be mobilised and convinced before committing their companies to the path of making official and framing the practices of sharing a labour force and of multi-activity. Moreover, the unhealthy atmosphere linked to the strike climate prevents the actors giving concrete shape to a collective project requiring the presence of a certain dose of mutual confidence.

We represent, with the aid of cursors positioned in the summarising table below, the characteristics of the emergent compromise (dark grey) as well as the developments which we can already observe or which are desired by the practice's actors in order to make it more 'desirable' (light grey).



This case study clearly shows how the diverse analysis variables we propose can acquire the status of conditions for a balanced and sustainable compromise established at inter-organisational level. It is only through moving a maximum of cursors, of which we try to show the effective and potential developments, towards the left of the table, that one could genuinely speak of a compromise which maintains the public interest.

**4. Towards a sustainable and balanced social compromises at inter-organisational level: proposition for a methodological stance**

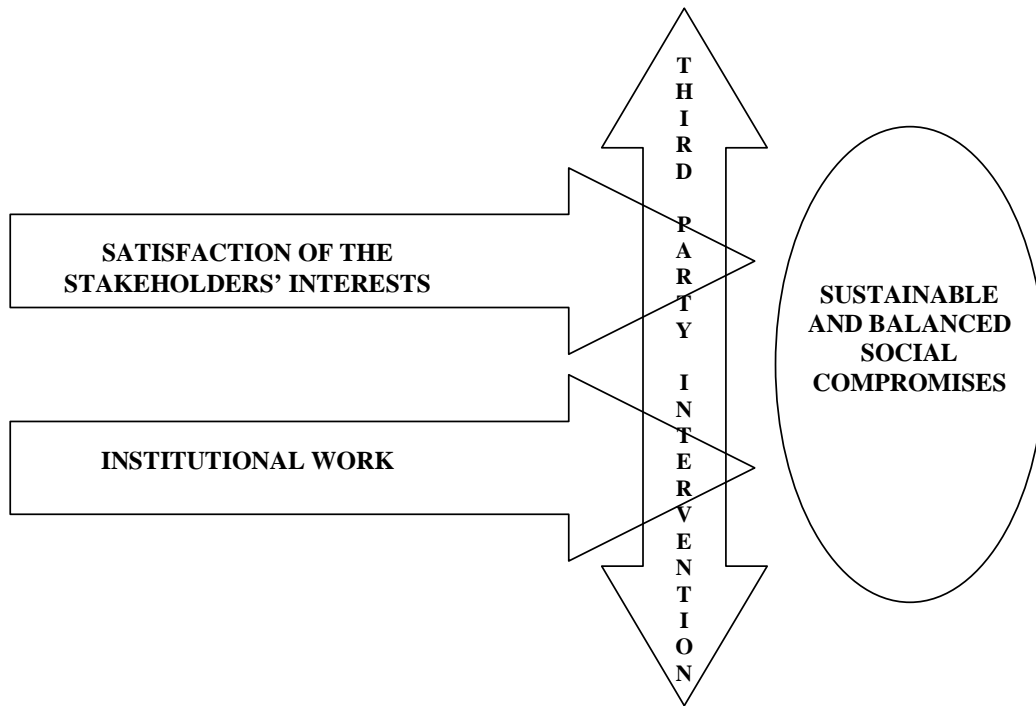
It is important to note that the variables which make up our analysis grid essentially refer to formal and processual dimensions. They do not aim at characterising the content of the compromise, on which it would be very difficult to find agreement, but rather the conditions in which it can emerge in a legitimate manner. The relative and contextual character of practices relating to reconciling flexibility and security in effect makes it difficult to identify substantive characteristics contributing to maintaining the public interest. The latter are always likely to be called into question according to developments in context, respective needs and the power relationships between actors.

In this perspective, it is respect for the ‘procedure’ which constitutes the validation criteria for the negotiated compromise (Rawls, 1987), and in a wider sense for the new form of regulation devised. Our grid consequently enables a highlighting of the conditions in which co-operation between actors leads to sustainable and balanced solutions. It is in effect a question of de-contextualising particular problematics to ensure the primacy of the generic over the specific.

Using this procedural base as a starting point, the work of reflection carried out with our case study’s stakeholders shows that not all the conditions have been reached, which explains why the arrangements described are still only at the proto-institution stage. Despite the satisfaction expressed by the management of the companies concerned, despite a real sense of evolution and the beginnings of consistency, the essential conditions of formalisation and regulation have not yet been met. This framework thus enables the construction of the ad hoc procedure for providing follow-up and guiding the actors in negotiating a better compromise, balanced and sustainable at the same time.

However, if we look closer, we see that the different variables of our grid fall back on different and complementary processes. Thus the variables which refer to the degree of inclusiveness, to the deliberate character and to the principle of two sided participation essentially concern the actors involved and their interactions. The criteria concerning the compromise’s evolving nature, its generic aspects, as well as its formalisation, regulation and consistency for their part refer to the mechanisms of structuring the compromise, in other words to the modes of institutionalising the compromises. Finally, the question of the presence and the role of a third party forms a third central dimension of our grid, which constitutes the conditions of possibility of other variables.

That is why, in order to foster the reaching of balanced and sustainable social compromises at inter-organisational level, we suggest adopting a methodological stance structured on three processes acting at once in parallel and in interaction with each other. The first process consists of working on satisfying the divergent interests of the compromise’s stakeholders; the second process concerns the work of institutionalising the compromises found; the third, which works transversally across the first two, resides in the intervention of a third party to bring to a successful conclusion the work on the actors’ satisfaction and on the institutionalisation of the compromise. This methodological stance is represented in the diagram below, and is explained and discussed in the sections which follow.



#### ***4.1. Satisfying stakeholders' interests***

##### *4.1.1 The stakes involved in satisfaction*

These emerging compromises are contributing to the development of new forms of social regulation aimed at framing the interactions at inter-organisational level. The aim of social regulation is to enable the system to find a balance, in taking into account the often contradictory interests and the power relationships between the actors which form it. It contributes to the well being of the workers as much as to the company's performance. It is nevertheless important to work not only on the institutionalisation of these arrangements: it is also, and above all, a question of seeing to it that they satisfy their stakeholders, and that they are considered 'acceptable' (Freyssinet, 2000) or even 'desirable' by them. It is thus important to open up the 'black box' of this satisfaction.

The labour market's stakeholders are at the very centre of the methodological stance we suggest. Their participation in developing new social regulations constitutes an essential dimension in the new social compromises concluded at inter-organisational level. The criteria of **inclusiveness** bears witness to it. This issue of inclusion and mobilisation proves to be even weightier in an inter-organisational context. The latter in effect makes the construction of systems of social regulation particularly crucial.

Differently to a classic company with clearly defined stakeholders and whose interactions are codified by a generally well rooted tradition of social dialogue, an inter-organisational partnership is characterised by a new and even shifting perimeter, and by actors with sometimes imprecise identities and issues which are revealed progressively. Economic,

managerial and social responsibilities are here separated, broken up between the multiple partners. The main aspects of daily management are here arranged through an interaction between the various stakeholders (suppliers, clients, business partners), and no longer within a single hierarchical line. Some authors talk of a heterarchy in this respect (Hedlund, 1986). Consequently, in an inter-organisational framework the stance concerning **inclusiveness** assumes involving in the deliberations not only the parties directly affected by the compromise being constructed, but also widening the stage of the debate to introduce actors who traditionally do not take part: prime contractors, partners within a network, local and regional groups, consumer associations, etc. This haziness involving stakeholders and their expectations makes even more arduous the search for a consensus concerning an arrangement everybody can consider satisfactory and 'desirable.'

Beyond the question of identifying, mobilising and giving a sense of responsibility to stakeholders, it is also a question on taking a bet on negotiation over confrontation, of finding a compromise over a practice and the regulations which frame it. The notion of compromise inevitably brings us to the notion of the stakeholders' satisfaction. For there to be a compromise, and thus reciprocal commitment, it is in effect necessary that the actors consider that their issues and expectations, whilst taking into account objective restrictions, are satisfied.

This means explaining the respective interests so that the negotiation can be carried out in a **deliberate** and **voluntary** manner. But to carry out this task of explaining and understanding interests it is necessary to avoid a rationalist bias which would define interests solely according to the category of the actors concerned. Interests are very contingent on the situation observed: it is likely to evolve according to economic circumstances, the power games within a category of actor, etc. We cannot thus simply assume from the presence of an actor the type of interest it will defend. These interests must thus be understood in a dynamic and systemic manner, in remaining attentive to developments in the system of interests likely to bring to completion the development of social regulation.

In addition, a purely procedural stance would remain on the periphery of the power relationships which are at the origin of practices of flexibilisation, and would have little to say concerning the power of the actors who would operationalise them. We cannot thus think through the logic of collective action without referring to the relationships of power and domination which mark these deliberative processes, without being fully aware of the inequalities and interdependences between actors, the differentials in terms of resources and abilities to frame arguments, etc. The effect of legitimisation produced by respect for the diverse procedural criteria set out earlier does not completely do away with the risk of reinforcing social domination over stakeholders who do not have available the necessary resources in order to bring to the fore their own needs and interests. It is thus important not to have relationships of domination masked by the screen of deliberation and debate. To end up in a genuine agreement, which is not the same as the acceptance of what it assumes to be a common outcome and the equivalence of the parties (Courpasson, 2000), it is necessary to objectivise and make possible the minimum conditions of negotiations.

The notion of satisfaction is difficult to objectivise. We presuppose that the actor has the ability to determine his own satisfaction, but it is however important to free ourselves from the language of optimisation. This idealistic vision of an actor capable of making optimal choices denies the restrictive context in which the practice emerges and develops. The result is a compromise which is by definition not optimal, but which must at the very least satisfy its

stakeholders in order to be able to claim legitimacy. We must also remain aware that routines and defensive strategies (Argyris, 1985) risk making the actor a prisoner of a kind of 'repetition compulsion' and risk preventing the emergence of a renewed framework of interaction which would enable a new sustainable and desirable form of social regulation to come into being.

The aggregative dynamic generated by the rule of **inclusiveness** is not sufficient in itself to transform the mental representations the actors have of themselves and others. If the participation of these actors finds its legitimacy in the fact that they themselves feel on a daily basis the tensions and breakdowns linked to the evolution of organisational forms, the process of deliberation assumes that the different actors involved have particular skills. Such skills essentially consist of a reflexive and critical ability to step back and assess vis-à-vis the subjects being debated, but also in terms of their own interests and issues as well as those of the other stakeholders. Allowing such skills to develop constitutes another of the conditions enabling the negotiation to bypass confrontation.

#### *4.1.2 The crucial role of a third party translator*

In unstable contexts filled with uncertainties, the putting into place of social regulation is thus not a natural inclination. It in effect risks appearing at any moment beneficial to one of the parties, to the detriment of the others, at least in a short term perspective. Furthermore, the inter-organisational field is not at all signposted from a normative point of view: the mechanisms of regulation must thus be defined from scratch. In this respect, the transversal process of the involvement of a third party makes full sense. **Third party intervention** enables a driving forward of the search for balanced solutions by taking into account the interests of all the stakeholders and avoiding the 'spontaneous' setting up or the reproduction of too asymmetrical power relationships, as well as avoiding the tendency for unilateral decision making. It also allows the assurance that all of the actors are in a position of *voice* (Hirschman, 1970), in other words that they can all speak up without any pressure and in taking the necessary step back to assess.

This role of a third party can here be considered that of a *translator* in Akrich, Callon and Latours' sense of the term (2006). It plays an essential role in the mobilisation and enlisting of multiple actors, a fortiori in an inter-organisational framework with a widened and original perimeter. Co-operation between the labour market's diverse stakeholders is far from being an evident truth, and proves to be even more hazardous in a field whose actors are not in the habit of co-operating. The third party thus has a crucial responsibility in identifying, explaining and translating the respective interests. It carries out social political work in order to help the actors, taking into account the divergent interests involved, define a common problematisation on the basis of which the new social regulation practice could be structured. The third party translator also contributes to disengaging the latter from the substantive debate over the win-win character in order to make them become aware of the procedural and formal aspects which condition it.

The third party thus has a role of guaranteeing that the search for and the reaching of the compromise takes place in a balanced way for all the parties involved. The model of deliberative engagement, typical of our post-industrial democratic systems, even if it can increase the capacity of social diagnosis and the power of legitimisation, does not in effect allow the pre-eminence of majority interest to be avoided (Maeschalk, 2008). The third party thus helps the actors to un-alienate themselves, to move beyond the simple satisfaction of

personal interests defined a priori, and to adapt on a permanent basis to the new role that is expected from them on the inter-organisational stage according to the evolution of the process. This role of enabling capabilities – in the sense of placing the individual and the group as an actor in their own transformation in collective contexts and processes – is not an easy one, as the actors have not been trained to give themselves new roles, a fortiori beyond the inter-organisational framework. Defensive strategies consequently predominate. The third party must at first bring all the parties to develop a reflexivity in relation to their own experiences in order to secondly expand the field of possibilities.

This unusual step, but which is essential from the perspective of institutionalizing compromises, requires the setting in place of conditions conducive to taking a step back. This is the *raison d'être* of a third party participant (Argyris et Schön, 1974; 1996). The latter guarantees the stakeholders continuous process of reflexivity in relation to themselves and their interests, which will enable them to identify the blocks they have already experienced and which they know can be repeated. Each of them will thus be able to detach themselves from the classic field of their mental representations and reposition themselves according to a new alternative. In the case of the Trilogi workers, it has not yet been possible to carry out the work of enabling capabilities, given the absence of a third party recognised by the various stakeholders.

These two obstacles to the satisfaction of the stakeholders – specifically the risk of reproducing relationships of domination and the difficulty the actors have in adopting a reflexive attitude – underlines the importance of putting in place mechanisms organising a response to the actors' finite nature. It is a question of avoiding the conclusion of purely ad hoc and circumstantial arrangements through aiming the spotlight at the processual dimensions which establish their solidity. It is in effect important to prop up this satisfaction and this compromise on mechanisms which guarantee their durability, which enable the actors to extricate themselves from mood swings, changes in actors and the wish to renegotiate. Institutional work must thus be carried out in order to formalise, regulate and render durable the fragile balance which might have been reached.

#### ***4.2 The institutional work***

The conflict between different rationalities is the lot of every organisation, and a fortiori inter-organisational partnerships. In these contexts in effect the social compromises are all the more fragile because they cannot be anchored in the habits of interaction and a pre-established regulation framework. The inter-organisational level nonetheless constitutes a real opportunity for the renewal of labour market regulation, as this new perimeter in which are emerging the practices which we are providing follow-up support for is more free from the routines which tend to put a brake on innovation. The fact remains that the ad hoc compromises discovered by the actors are still based on the expression of a contingent and circumstantial satisfaction, and that it is important to make these arrangements durable if we want their effects to be fully felt and for them to constitute local innovations on the basis of which the new forms of social regulation demanded by a growing number of actors in the labour market can be structured. As Norbert Alter (2007) points out, institutionalisation not only transforms into law practices which were run on an informal basis. It has above all the objective of ensuring balance between several actors, in reducing the uncertainties of the framework in which they are exercised in rendering it durable and predictable. It is thus important, in parallel with looking for balanced agreements, to also work towards the institutionalisation of these compromises.

It is thus a question of at first getting down to the task of establishing or even reinforcing the legitimacy of the agreement. This in effect constitutes an essential prerequisite for enabling its institutionalisation (Human & Provan, 2000; Palmer *et al.*, 1993). This job of legitimization rests in large part on a strategic use of discourse (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006), named theorization (Greenwood *et al.*, 2002). This task consists of drawing up chains of causalities which enable the informal practices' *raison d'être* to be explained. It aims to highlight the obsolescence of traditional social regulation, its inability to play its role in the new perimeters which are inter-organisational partnerships. It is a matter of defining three modalities of legitimacy: pragmatic, moral and cognitive modalities (Suchman, 1995). The pragmatic modality of legitimacy is developed in convincing the actors of the pre-eminence of the arrangement suggested in relation to the other possible modalities, and of its ability to meet their respective interests. The moral legitimacy of the emergent mechanism rests for its part on its social acceptability and its capacity to serve the public interest. Suchman (1995) in effect defines legitimacy as the perception of the desirability of an action. This perception is obviously eminently contingent, as it rests on a shared ensemble of judgment criteria (social norms, values, beliefs, etc.). In an emergent field, as is that of social regulation at inter-organisational level, these norms and values are always hazy and being debated. The process of institutionalisation is thus different from that at work in a mature field where it essentially consists of connecting the innovation to existing arrangements. In the case of our inter-organisational partnerships developing at the micro-economic level, aligning the compromise to the norms of the field is more complex: the interactions of the values of the different stakeholders during negotiations and reaching the compromise will themselves contribute to defining and fixing the norms of the new field (Maguire *et al.*, 2004). This new context allows the full meaning of social innovation to be expressed, as it goes beyond the simple adjustment of an existing mechanism to rethink the very fundamentals of social compromise. It is furthermore that which, in the particular case we are concerned with, makes the quest for the cognitive modality of legitimacy particularly arduous, because social innovation in terms of reconciling flexibility and security precisely questions existing models and standards.

A second essential dimension of institutionalisation resides in the **regulation** of the emergent mechanism. It is a question of defining clearly the terms of the compromise, to give it concrete shape and make it lean on modalities of supervision and a code of sanctions. These can be built on various types of basis: cultural norms and traditions, collective conventions, laws, etc. We saw earlier that the context of the emergent field within which we are inscribed opened up new perspectives in terms of the bedrock on which to anchor this system of monitoring and sanctions. The actors must thus define with precision the modalities of interaction, their respective responsibilities and prepare the manner of coping with non respect for the rules. It is also a question of **formalising** the agreement and its modalities so that the informal arrangement can be transformed into a mechanism which structures the actors' actions. The emergent practice must in effect reach routine status – in other words a sequence of repetitive, patterned sequence of behaviour involving multiple actors linked by communication or authority (Andersen, 2003; Nelson & Winter, 1982) – which will enable the new relational system to be strengthened and made durable, and contribute to the progressive atrophy and even disappearance of the old system (Maguire *et al.*, 2004). Once the compromise has become formalized and made routine, it becomes independent of the actors who appropriate it; it structures the field and becomes self-reproducing, which constitutes proof of its **generic** nature and its durability.

It is also important to attach to the compromise's regulation the modalities of its transformation, in order to meet the criteria of its **evolving** nature and to avoid freezing social dynamics. Institutionalisation will allow uncertainty to be reduced, but it has to leave a place for creativity, for using uncertainty, and for the transformation of its rules. This proves to be all the more necessary in that the precisely innovative nature of emergent arrangements places them straightaway in an awkward position in relation to existing social regulation mechanisms. The inter-organisational perimeter in which it comes to light straightaway contests the traditional levels of regulation, whether they are those of the company, the sector, the region or the nation. The whole stake of institutionalisation will be to place, by various means, these new and scattered mechanisms in coherent line with the other legal and conventional frameworks. This process, termed co-regulation, aims to provide the effects of regulation on the basis of situations in which different norms or other mechanisms, public or private, are put together, complement each other (or if need be counteract each other), in a concerted manner or not, deliberately or fortuitously (Frydman, 2007). This institutional task will thus require integrating progressively the new regulation which represents the compromise in the other levels of social regulation, and this concerns the condition of **consistency** identified through our partnership processes.

#### *4.2.1 The crucial role of the third party institutional entrepreneur*

Much as for the satisfaction of the arrangement's stakeholders' divergent interests, the intervention of a third party appears very useful – if not necessary – for creating the conditions of the arrangement's durability. Its role is therefore no longer to translate the interests at play in order to foster the emergence of a shared debate, but also to help the actors to legitimize the practice, to formalise the agreement and to integrate it into the system of social relations in force on the labour market. The third party thus acts not as a translator, but as an *institutional entrepreneur*, in the sense DiMaggio (1988) gives the term: in this perspective, the third party is an actor who mobilises resources in order to transform existing institutions or to make new ones emerge.

The third party institutional entrepreneur will thus tackle the task of legitimising the agreement. To do so it will work on theorising the agreement. On the basis of specifying the 'failings' in the field the third party entrepreneur will justify the existence of the practice which reconciles flexibility and security and see to it that it is perceived as more appropriate than existing social compromises (Tolbert and Zucker, 1996; Greenwood and Suddaby, 2002). This actor will deploy rhetorical pearls to convince the stakeholders of the arrangement's ability to meet the various respective expectations, all the while maintaining the public interest. This process is not a one-off; it is on the contrary continuous, as such a conception of legitimacy through the desirability of actions boils down to describing this notion by its outcome, in other words by the interest felt individually and collectively of the arrangement's hoped for consequences. In this perspective the real legitimacy will only be observed after the fact.

The institutional entrepreneur also contributes to setting up a system for the agreement's governance. We have underlined above the importance of structuring the collaboration between the compromise's stakeholders and to determine deliberately and in an anticipative way the rules which will govern their actions – notably in terms of communication, co-ordination, decision making, etc. The third party plays a central role in making the actors become aware of the stakes of such a governance, to make the rules come into being and to

ensure that they are established and validated collectively, and that the balance of the exchange is respected. It also ensures that the rules are formalised: it gives the agreement a material dimension, through documents and tools which officialise the emergent arrangement and which the actors can access if need be.

Finally, the institutional entrepreneur has the task of creating bridges between the compromise which is on the path towards institutionalisation and the other pre-existing compromises. Its role is to facilitate the integration of the compromise in the overall system of regulation, in setting up links with the other levels of regulation which function in parallel, on the macro as well as the meso and meta level, and in verifying that it does not fall into contradiction with the principles in force at other levels. It can furthermore extend his theorisation work to the stakeholders of the labour market within a wider perimeter, to see to it that the reconciliation solution is perceived by all as pertinent and consistent. It is in effect the building of the new practice into a network of sustainable and long term relationships which constitutes the ultimate condition of its institutionalisation.

## **Conclusion**

The co-ordination of a European research-action plan interrogating the relevance of the flexicurity approach at the micro-economic level offered us the opportunity to provide, for close to three years, follow-up support for diverse emergent practices in reconciling the needs of flexibility and security being put in place at the level of a region, a labour pool, a business partnership, etc. Our interrogation focused on the conditions of the institutionalisation of flexicurity compromises emerging at the heart of these diverse partnerships. Through this experimental step, our objective was to genuinely open up the black box of these processes, to observe in fine detail the internal processes which enable the construction of a legitimate collective dynamic.

The participative methodology which we put into practice for this occasion has permitted us to provide some elements of a response to this question, through the identification of indicators allowing the existing compromises to be characterised and to determine the action levers required to confer legitimacy and longevity on these compromises. These different variables, descriptive and evaluative at the same time, constitute the plinth of a collective dynamic articulated through three processes: the first targets the satisfaction of the divergent interests of the compromise's stakeholders, the second underlines the necessity of work on institutions, and the third brings out the crucial character of the intervention of a third party actor to lead the first two processes to a successful conclusion.

The methodological stance that we propose to promote the reaching of social compromises capable of maintaining the public interest rests on a bet: that of negotiation over confrontation. From the basis of our fieldwork, we postulate that it is possible to create the minimum conditions in which the actors can talk to each other and negotiate. Following the example of Anthony Giddens (2000), we suggest a 'third way', situated between a determinist and structuralist approach dominated by a perspective of social classes with fundamentally divergent interests, and a rationalist and consensual approach leaning on confidence between actors in order to make optimal solutions come to the fore. The particular way which we privilege acknowledges the existence of a plurality of tangled logics but centres on the setting up of mechanisms allowing the actors to come to awareness of the objective conditions in which they find themselves, and to discover on this basis sustainable and balanced compromises.

Our approach aims to go beyond any explanatory 'monism'. When we highlight the crucial character of the intervention of a third party in this process, we mobilize two complementary theoretical currents which converge around the notion of a third party: the theory of institutional entrepreneurship and actor-network theory. The first, with origins in economics, places the accent on structural pressures within the field; the second, with origins in sociology, underlines the weight of power relationships. The bringing together of these two theoretical approaches (Leca *et al.*, 2006) allows us to usefully illuminate the two faces of an essential function of triangulation, a combining of which being the only way to ensure the actors' reflexivity.

In a more general way, our explanatory pluralism also rests on the attempt we are making to insert the deliberative process into a more structuralist approach. Following the example of Bourdieu (1987) and Giddens (1987), we acknowledge the weight of objective social structures which, in certain circumstances, make this betting on negotiation impossible. Nonetheless, we propose an ensemble of formal and socio-political conditions, which come under both structuralism and interactionism, and which allow for a going beyond any naivety in order to make sure, through the intervention of a third party, that the ensemble of objective conditions are met in order to enable negotiation to contribute to the search for the general interest.

The identity, the attributes and the role of this third party have only been lightly touched upon over this article. We can nevertheless see that the transversal process of the intervention of a third party constitutes a crucial and essential dimension of the methodological stance we propose. It is nonetheless important to clarify this question of a third party. The identification of a third party, the translator of the different interests at play and an entrepreneur in the institutional process, is a particularly delicate task, requiring respect for the conditions it is important to identify. To keep our comments straightforward we have presented the third party as an individual actor, unique, determined and interested. We would nonetheless draw attention to the complexity of this notion of a third party, which in reality covers very diversified situations according to the contexts in which these compromises emerge. This third party role could be taken in hand in individual fashion by a single actor. It could also constitute a collective process within which different actors with complementary skills intervene. Questions remain concerning its identity and attributes: should it be an expert or uninformed? Internal or external to the compromise? Neutral or interested? Going deeper into this crucial function of a third party thus constitutes an essential task in strengthening the methodological stance we propose. This question, the complexity of which we have here only sketched out, will be the subject of a subsequent article.

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