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**Decentralisation in France: central steering, capacity  
building and identity construction**

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### **Abstract**

This article provides an overview on decentralization in France from three distinct conceptual lenses. It considers decentralisation in France first as part of a wider process of state reform, an example of ‘steering at a distance’ drawn from a subset of the literature on governance. The second reading is of decentralization as part of an iterative process of local and regional capacity building. The third reading of decentralization, drawn from literature on new regionalism and minority nationalism, tests linkages between identity formation and meso-level political institutions. Though each hypothesis can draw some support from the evidence presented, the article concludes that capacity building captures the dynamic process unleashed by decentralisation better than either central state steering or identity-based mobilisation.

The movement of decentralisation in France has been gathering pace since the 1960s, with the landmark reforms of 1982-83 and 2003-4 representing staging posts in an ongoing process of incremental change. How best can we understand decentralisation in France? Ought we to interpret decentralisation as part of a wider process of state reform, as a strengthening of local and regional capacity, as a response to new forms of identity politics or as some combination of these? Conceptually, the article views decentralisation in France through three alternative prisms that we label as central steering, capacity building and identity construction. These interpretations emerged from a content analysis of around 150 interviews with actors of the decentralised policy communities in two French regions (Brittany and Nord/Pas-de-Calais) as well as with a smaller number of key actors in Paris.<sup>1</sup> Interlocutors repeatedly interpreted decentralisation in terms of one (or more) of these three main understandings, each of which is also embedded in different academic literatures. Empirically, the article draws upon a mix of primary and secondary literature on decentralisation, provides insights from extensive interviews, and, in the final section, reports the results of a mass survey on decentralisation carried out in the Brittany region in 2001.

Our first hypothesis is that decentralisation in France is part of a broader programme of state reform, part of a drive by central governors to divest themselves of unwanted or inflationary functions. It is an exercise in

steering at a distance. The metaphor of steering is drawn from the governance literature (Marin and Mayntz, 1991; Mayntz, 1993; Rhodes, 1997; Pierre, 2000, Gaudin, 2002), in particular its German version. For Mayntz (1993: 11) the metaphor of ‘steering’ refers to ‘the ability of political authorities to mould their social environments’. In recent decades governments in all European countries have been confronted with a weakening capacity to steer society by proposing solutions to the problems they have identified. Modern states need to lower expectations of public policy action and develop new policy instruments to manage complexity (Le Galès and Lascoumbes, 2004). The history of French decentralisation can be interpreted as part of a broader effort by the French state to deal with the increasing complexity of its charge and to reform itself (Caillose, 2004; Crozier, 1992). The state can no longer assume alone the management of complexity, if ever it could. ‘Steering at a distance’ refers to one strategy to cope with increased complexity: namely, that of delegating difficult decisions to lower echelons of public administration.

For some supporters of decentralisation, the state is an ineffective local policy-maker because it ignores local knowledge and circumstances. Our *second hypothesis* is that of decentralisation can be explained in terms of new forms of local and regional capacity building. Decentralisation is best understood in terms of liberating the entrepreneurial energies and political capacity of local and regional players. We define capacity in terms of viable institutions, embedded inter-institutional relationships, political leadership and policy entrepreneurship, asymmetry in policy delivery and the

development of local and regional public arenas. Thus defined, capacity is broadly derived from the local political leadership and urban governance literature (Stone, 1989, Hirst, 1994, John, 2001, Le Galès, 2002 ). Though decentralisation is justified in terms of enhancing local and regional capacity, it is not in this hypothesis explicitly linked with identity politics.

Our *third hypothesis* is that decentralisation in France is shaped by new forms of identity-based territorial mobilisation. Minority nationalism and political regionalism have emerged as powerful forces across Western Europe (McEwen and Moreno, 2005). There has been a revival of ethno-territorial identities and a challenge to the centralist model of the unitary state (Keating, Loughlin and Deschouer, 2003 Keating and McGarry, 2001; de Winter and Türsan, 1998, Keating, 1998). As local and regional communities are imagined in distinctive ways in different places, so the pattern in Europe is for an ‘asymmetrical configuration of government and a multiplicity of institutional regimes’ (Majone, 2003). Strong identity can be translated in political terms by the development of ethno-territorial parties; in cultural terms by the dissemination of identity markers such as language, in institutional terms by the construction of alternative polity building visions or, in its weakest form, by methods of elite accommodation.

Thus designed, the article sets out to evaluate the relative importance of state reform, capacity building and territorial identities as explanatory variables for understanding decentralisation in France. Conceptualisation is essential in order to research the complex research object of French

decentralisation. Our dependent variable ('decentralisation') is itself a compound entity that encompasses actor motivations, institutional and policy outputs and political and partisan processes. The framework we propose allows explanations to be contextualised according to whether we place most importance on the motivations imputed to actors (hypothesis one), explanations of institutional and policy outputs (hypothesis two) or political and partisan processes (hypothesis three). The main body of the article now addresses the arguments for interpreting decentralisation in terms of these three alternative approaches. It begins with an introduction to the context of French centralisation and decentralisation.

### **Centralisation and Decentralisation in France**

France is traditionally presented as the paradigm of the unitary state. The French revolution of 1789 (and its Napoleonic aftermath) swept away provincial autonomy and created a sophisticated administrative infrastructure throughout the French territory (Dupuy and Thoenig, 1985). The deep penetration of the state into civil society remains highly visible in France today (Page, 1991, Sharpe, 1993). The traditional French system of 'territorial administration' rested upon the principle of administrative uniformity across the nation (Sadran 1992). It recognised the superiority of central state interests over those of parties, interest groups and localities. It formed part of a hierarchical mode of top-down organisation, whereby public policies originated within government departments or administrative corps; were implemented in localities by state field agencies and local

authorities, and were co-ordinated by the prefect, the representative of the French State in the departments.

In practice, centre-periphery relations were much more flexible than this model implied, as uncovered in the empirical studies undertaken by researchers in the Centre for the Sociology of Organisations (CSO) in the 1960s and 1970s (Worms, 1966; Crozier and Thoenig, 1975; Grémion, 1976). Particularly influential, the ‘cross-regulation’ approach developed by Crozier and Thoenig (1975) described relations between local political and administrative actors in this state-centric and bureaucratic system. Three pillars supported the system. First, national politicians and officials defined the rules governing centre-periphery relations. Second, there was a long-term dialogue between state officials (notably the prefect) and leading notables to allow for adjustments to nationally defined rules to reflect local circumstances. Third, local relationships were limited to a ‘dual elite’ of political and administrative actors; there was no place for ‘third parties, whether they be economic interests or voluntary associations’ (Duran and Thoenig, 1996, p. 588). The principal local relationships in this pattern of cross-regulation were between political notables (parliamentarians, mayors, departmental councillors) and state officials (either prefects, or officials from the ministerial field services). There was an incentive for ambitious politicians to accumulate elective offices (cumul des mandats) as office gave access to higher levels of authority and consolidated local power bases.



The model of cross-regulation applied mainly to rural and small town France. Large cities, undertaking cohesive public policies from the early twentieth century in some instances, fell outside of the cross-regulation model. From the 1960s onwards, the model of cross-regulation became less influential in rural areas and small towns as well. During the 1970s, the localist case began to be won at the level of ideas (Ohnet, 1996; Boeuf, 2004) The watershed in the governance of French municipalities occurred in 1977, when the left captured control of almost three-quarters of large towns. Left-run municipalities were not content to engage in traditional lobbying practices. Many of the new municipal teams were strongly influenced by the ideas of the May '68 movement, notably those of self-management and social experimentation. A belief in proximity, democratic empowerment, citizenship and local self-reliance were thus important facets of a changing ideological and policy climate that preceded the institutional reforms of the early 1980s.

The French Socialist government's reforms of 1982-3 were ambitious (Boguenard, 2004; Gaudemet and Gohin, 2004; Levy, 2001; Schmidt, 1990). The reforms both created new institutions (the 22 elected regional councils), and greatly enhanced the decision-making powers of existing players (the 96 departmental councils and the larger communes). The decentralisation reforms recognised local authorities as fully operational legal entities freed from a priori prefectural control. The decision-making responsibilities of local and regional actors were increased, with the extension of sub-national influence into new policy areas such as social

affairs, economic development and education. In most respects, the ‘departmentalists’ defeated the ‘regionalists’ in 1982-83, as they would again in 2003-4. The departments were given larger budgets, more staff and more service-delivery responsibilities than the regions. Central government preferred to deal with the relatively subservient departments, rather than strong regions which might contest its authority.

The 1982 reforms were guided by two rather contradictory principles: that types of decision should be attributed to specific ‘levels’ of public administration (communal, departmental, regional); but that all authorities should be free to develop policies in areas they deemed to be important for their constituents (Fonrojet, 2004). The first of these principles enshrined the so-called ‘blocs de compétences’, signifying particular responsibilities carried out by the different levels. As a general rule, matters of immediate proximity (low-level social assistance, administrative port of first call, planning permission, waste) are the preserve of the communes and the various inter-communal bodies –SIVU<sup>2</sup>, SIVOM<sup>3</sup>, EPCI<sup>4</sup> - to which they delegate authority. Matters of intermediate proximity are the policy province of the 96 departmental councils, which manage large budgets and are major service delivery agencies (in social assistance, some intermediate education, social services, roads and the minimal income [RMA]). Matters deemed to be strategic are, in theory, the preserve of the regional councils: economic development, vocational training, infrastructure, some secondary education, some transport (and regional rail services since 2002), with additional responsibilities in culture, the environment and health. The second principle

– that of the ‘free administration of local authorities’ – cuts across the apparent clarity of the first. In practice, the various sub-national authorities have overlapping territorial jurisdictions and loosely defined spheres of competence. Moreover, there is no formal hierarchy between them. No single authority can impose its will on any other, or prevent a rival authority from adopting policies in competition with its own. Unlike in federal systems, the French regions do not exercise leadership over other local authorities; if anything, the French regions are dependent upon the co-operation of lower-level authorities – the departments in particular – for the successful implementation of their own policies. The various levels of sub-national government are presented in Table 1.

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After its revision in March 2003, the French constitution now recognises four levels of local authority: the commune, the department, the region (new) and those with a ‘special statute’ (new). ‘Who does what’ is arguably not the most interesting question. French sub-national governance rests upon a complex actor system, whereby policy is managed by plural actors with overlapping responsibilities at several levels. Complex actor systems produce interdependent relationships, rather than clear-cut transfers of responsibilities. This interdependency can legitimately give rise to contrasting interpretations of decentralisation, three of which we now consider.

## **Decentralisation as Steering at a distance?**

If the cross-regulation model applied principally to the pre-Second World War period, the first thirty years of the post-war period were those of technocratic modernisation. The ‘orthodox’ account of French public policy, developed principally by Jobert and Muller in L’Etat en action (1987) describes determined central state action, uncovers the existence of tight policy communities located within the state and diagnoses a specific form of French state corporatism. This state-centric model had important ramifications for territorial public policy-making. Modernising state planners piloted most significant public policies in the 1950s and 1960s (Lorrain 1991). The French state combined various forms of direct and indirect control over territorial planning (aménagement du territoire). In a direct sense, central actors determined territorial planning priorities and ensured a steady flow of financial resources to fund centrally defined projects<sup>5</sup>. Territorial planning activities were above all the policy province of the bridges and highways (ponts-et-chaussées) corps that controlled the engineers working in the Infrastructure ministry (Thoenig 1973). Indirect methods of control of central government were even more effective. Adopting a standard-setting role, central actors dictated technical norms in housing, road building and infrastructure<sup>6</sup>. The state could rely on a network of state field services and agencies to implement its will in French localities. The most significant of these were the Caisse des dépôts et de consignations, the state lending bank that controlled most finance; the Directions départementales d’Equipment (DDE), the departmentally-based

field services of the Equipment ministry and the DATAR. The DATAR was created in 1963 as a central state agency ‘to accompany the development of the French desert around Paris’<sup>7</sup> through making strategic investments in economic development. It remains a key player in the process of central steering, as demonstrated by its lead role in the competitive clusters (‘pôles de compétitivité’) programme of the Villepin government.

The top-down model was (initially) distrustful of local, regional or even administrative decentralisation. The gradual empowerment of a meso-level of public administration in the late 1950s and early 1960s reflected the inability of the central state to achieve its objectives alone. Regional structures were created as technocratic outposts of the French state, to assist in strategic functions of economic development, transport and territorial planning. The regional administrative constituencies (conférences administratives régionales - CAR) set up in 1955 were the precursors of the first regional councils (établissements publics régionaux - EPR) created in 1972 (Ohnet, 1996; Dumont, 2005). In time, these nominated bodies became directly elected levels of sub-national government from 1986 onwards. Administrative decentralisation (‘deconcentration’) preceded political decentralisation by two decades, however. The creation of the regional prefectures in 1964 marked the first significant regionalisation of state structures. Rather like the regional councils later, the regional prefectures were light, strategic bodies that could coordinate the activities of the much weightier departmental prefectures.

Once decentralisation had been implemented in the early 1980s, central government began to change the mode of its intervention in French localities and regions. In the early years after 1982, decentralisation was experienced as a loss of prestige by certain state corps (highways and bridges, notably)<sup>8</sup>. Bringing the State back in the governance of French localities and regions was achieved by the State-Region plans, introduced in the 1982 decentralisation law (Gaudin, 1999; Pasquier, 2004; Pontier, 1998). Under the terms of the 1982 law, the regional council first draws up a regional plan and then negotiates with the State-in-Region, represented by the regional prefecture. One interpretation of State-Region planning is as a new form of central steering, with the infrastructure of the regional prefectures used to direct regional policy choices. Through the State-Region plans, the central state has been able to impose some its own priorities on the regions, in the fields of higher education<sup>9</sup> and transport<sup>10</sup> notably. For a number of interlocutors in the French regions, the State-region plans are a means for central government to mobilize the financial resources of local and regional government in the pursuit of its own objectives. The sums of money involved in the State-Region plans are considerable. Henceforth, a proportion of the regional budget ranging from 15-25% (according to region) is devoted to ongoing items, co-financed by the regions, the state and the European Union (EU), that do not fall within the region's legal responsibilities (Pasquier, 2004). Regional council ownership of the plans is limited by the fact that all plans have to be agreed by the Inter-ministerial Territorial Planning Committee (Comité interministeriel de l'aménagement

et du développement du territoire - CIADT), a structure attached to the Prime Minister's office from which the regional Presidents are excluded.

State-Region plans can not, however, be reduced to crude central steering. Through its use of contracts, the French state has begun to operate in a more flexible manner in an attempt to mobilise resources beyond its control (Richter, 2004, Gaudin, 1999, 2002). Contractual procedures are inherently unstable and they can produce outcomes that are variable across the national territory<sup>11</sup>. They involve negotiation between partners with the status of formal equals and the departmental and regional councils can refuse to agree to the State's demands.<sup>12</sup> Rather than crude central steering, meso-level governance in contemporary France is characterised by more interdependent forms of policy-making and above all by the importance of contractual processes – such as State-Region plans, the City Contracts, Higher Education contracts, or security contracts - that have produced differential outcomes across France.

We defined steering at a distance as the top-down impulse of delegating difficult decisions to lower echelons of public administration. Nowhere was this rationale more apparent than in the 2004 Decentralisation Act. An internal circular within the Prime Minister's office that accompanied the publication of the proposition de loi in December 2002 referred to those areas to be transferred as those which were 'technically and socially the most difficult'.<sup>13</sup> Deep suspicions of central government motives were raised in interviews in the summer of 2002 concerning the future reform<sup>14</sup>.

As the decentralisation debates unfolded in 2003/4, opposition hardened to the transfer of functions and personnel, particularly in the sensitive areas of educational and health staff.

The core of the ‘steering at a distance’ claim lies in the financial disengagement of the state. The sentiment was repeatedly expressed in interviews in 2002 that functions must not be decentralised without complete financial compensation. The 2003 Constitutional Reform and the 2004 Decentralisation Act contained rather conflicting provisions for local government finances. The reformed constitution now embeds the principle of the financial autonomy of local authorities (Ba, 2004; Connétable, 2004). The constitution now affirms that the principle of ‘free administration’ requires local and regional authorities to be responsible for raising the ‘overwhelming proportion’ of their revenues in local taxation. The provision implies that local and regional authorities would be given far greater tax-raising powers, able to vary, within limits, local taxation. This provision raised much opposition on behalf of local and regional politicians. The tax-raising power, welcome in principle, would force local politicians to raise taxes in order to run unpopular services. The main fear was that financial transfers from central government would be reduced accordingly (Sueur, 2005).

Decentralisation as ‘steering at a distance’ has a powerful resonance. The delegation of new service delivery responsibilities forms part of a broader process of state reform, the perennial preoccupation of policy-makers in



France. In the debate on local finances, there were echoes of British-style new public management, insofar as government ministers welcome the prospect that local financial accountability would be enhanced. Steering at a distance was not in the least a federal conception. Services would be delivered at a regional, departmental or local level in ways that were closely regulated and defined by the central state.

### **Decentralisation as local and regional capacity building?**

Our *second hypothesis* we label as local and regional capacity building. Political scientists understand capacity in a variety of ways (Gambetta, 1988; Stone, 1989; John, 2001; Pasquier, 2004). Capacity can be interpreted in a top down sense, in terms of the resources that localities, departments or regions need to possess in order to conform to government or EU directives or to implement policies. In unitary states especially, the implementation capacity of local authorities is a constant preoccupation of central government. Capacity can also be understood in a more constructivist way in terms of the internal qualities of localities and regions, their visions of the future and perception of their role. We argue that innovation in France's regions and localities has been driven by the emergence of more cohesive local government structures, the strengthening of local political leadership, the development of more entrepreneurial forms of policy-making, the generalization of new forms of asymmetrical policy delivery, the growth of sub-national expertise and influence in European

affairs and the emergence of new local and regional public spheres as arenas for collective action.

More cohesive local government structures provide support for capacity building. French sub-national governance has traditionally been characterised by resource-based competition between overlapping layers of public administration: the 36500 communes, 2000 or so inter-communal bodies, 96 departments and 22 regions in mainland France. This institutional diversity is made even more complex by the penetration of the central state's ministerial field services into the smallest French towns. This pattern of public administration has had many zero-sum qualities: as embodied in damaging tax competition between communes, overlapping and competitive modes of service delivery between layers of local government and institutional turf wars between local authorities and state field services<sup>15</sup>.

More cohesive local government structures have developed in recent years. They are rooted in urban governance and processes of metropolitanisation (Ascher, 1998; Le Galès, 2002). In France's urban areas, successive laws and regulations since the 1960s have attempted to adapt local government structures to take account of sociological and demographic change. While large cities typically contain 30-80 communes, public policy problems do not respect such small communal boundaries. There has been a growing impetus behind the development of city-wide local government structures as a tool for tackling problems of urban governance. The most complex of these city-wide inter-communal structures are the urban communities,

created in 1968, that administer many of the traditional communal functions in France's largest cities, such as Lyons, Marseilles and Lille. Reforms in the 1990s sought to strengthen further city governments, particularly through developing the inter-communal public corporations (Établissements publics de co-operation intercommunale - EPCI) (Marcou, 2004; Boeuf, 2004b). Most medium-sized and large cities are now administered by these (indirectly elected) public corporations which are vested with tax-varying and service delivery powers. The technical expertise of these city governments has greatly improved due to the rise of urban development agencies, bodies staffed by planning experts, economists and urban geographers<sup>16</sup>. Such agencies have reduced the reliance on state field services, especially those of the Infrastructure ministry.

Interconnectivity provides a variation on the theme of meso-level capacity. Local and regional authorities need to develop efficient horizontal and vertical relationships - or at least to avoid damaging zero-sum disputes - if there are to carry out their minimal duties. Good relationships are required to make the institutions of French sub-national governance function effectively. Relationships between levels of meso-level governance (local, departmental, regional) are not necessarily played out as a zero-sum game. The ability of a regional council, for example, to articulate an overarching territorial vision might be enhanced by strengthening inter-communal collaboration. Inter-communal structures, usually based on employment or training zones that are substantially larger than traditional communal

boundaries, are generally consistent with the region's own planning on a sub-regional level.

The state of inter-institutional linkages varies in accordance with local and regional circumstances. Empirical investigation we carried out in two French regions revealed very contrasting patterns (Cole, 2006, Cole and John, 2001). The Brittany region stands out for its high level of cross-communal co-operation, not only in urban centres such as Rennes, but in the rural hinterland as well. Brittany scores highly in terms of institutional inter-connectivity, embodied by established traditions of inter-communal co-operation and normally harmonious relationships between regional politicians and representatives of the state field services. In Nord/Pas-de-Calais, on the other hand, a long tradition of urban rivalry, fractious state-region relationships and poor relationships between local politicians and business actors traditionally produced sub-optimal local outcomes.

More cohesive local government structures have encouraged stronger local political leadership, another key dimension of capacity building (John and Cole, 1999). City case studies have long demonstrated the importance not only of the local environment in shaping the character of local political leadership, but also of the ability of local leaders to shape their environments (Lagroye, 1973; Biarez, 1989; Phlipponeau, 1977; Borraz, 1998). The local government route can produce political leaders of international reputations, such as Bertrand Delanöe in Paris. The mayoral office, rather than the presidency of a departmental or a regional council,

continues to be the most coveted amongst politicians with a base in local government. Decentralisation enhanced the power of urban mayors by loosening tight state controls on their financial capacity and by increasing their legal and political scope for innovation (Faure, 1991, Lorrain, 1991, Lorrain 1993, Borraz, 1998). Successful mayors have become more entrepreneurial. Across France, mayors have also placed themselves at the head of new-style development coalitions, mobilising large-scale public and private resources for ambitious development projects (Le Galès, 1995).

On the other hand, the more composite environment produced by decentralisation has made the mayoral function far more complex. Specialisation has diversified the structures of local power. With decentralisation, the mayor's executive officers ('adjoints') have become central actors (Borraz, 1998). As local authorities have developed their policy capacities, the adjoints have become real specialists in their chosen areas, enabling them to engage in a dialogue of equals with technical experts and representatives of local pressure groups. Whereas local interactions would previously be limited to those between of mayors and prefects, local networks have become much broader, to encompass mayors and their adjoints, representative of local economic power (chambers, employers' associations, individual business people), voluntary associations and public-private partnerships (mixed economy societies) (Gaudin, 1995; Gaudin, 1999; Le Galès 1995; Cole and John, 1995). Local power has become more complex, and the successful mayors are those powerful enough to pull the shifting framework together.

Local and regional authorities have become more entrepreneurial, a third key dimension of capacity building. Joint venture companies (known as ‘mixed economy societies’) have allowed local (and in some cases regional) authorities to launch ambitious development projects part-financed by private capital.<sup>17</sup> Such joint ventures are not new, tracing their history back to 1926, but decentralisation loosened considerably the administrative constraints conditioning their operation. As mixed economy societies are subject to civil, rather than to administrative law, they are much more flexible than local authorities themselves. Joint ventures have been used for purposes of transport, museums, theatres, sporting facilities, tourism, conference centres, even hotel chains (Ascher 1998, Heinz, 1994, Lorrain 1991, Lorrain, 1993 ). At their most ambitious, mixed economy societies have acted as a conduit for large-scale foreign direct investment into French localities. Mixed economy societies have facilitated the introduction of private sector management techniques (such as the freedom to recruit part-time and temporary workers and more flexible accounting practices) while retaining overall public sector control of joint ventures.

Arguably the most significant feature of France’s local and regional governance is the new reality of asymmetrical variation. Even before the 2003 constitutional reform, there were many ways in which outcomes could vary across the country. The principle of ‘free administration’ presupposes that local and regional authorities can choose their domains of policy intervention (subject to their legal duty to administer certain services). Local

and regional authorities can determine how they are organised internally, what rates of local taxation they levy (within strict limits), how they organise service delivery (whether they contract services out to private firms for example). The creation after 1999 of powerful inter-communal authorities across France has increased the diversity of local practices beyond that previously ensured by the principle of ‘free administration’ (Boeuf, 2004b). Within limits, the EPCI are free to negotiate which policy responsibilities are transferred up to the supra-communal body and which remain with individual communes. In small town and rural areas, the pays are potentially even more innovative; these inter-communal bodies are based on specific local projects, which can involve experimental transfers of authority (Portier, 2003).

The 2003 constitutional reform and the 2004 Decentralisation Act introduce two new ways in which outcomes can vary across the country: the special statute authorities and ‘experimentation’. The special statute clause covers the various types of inter-communal bodies (EPCI). It also refers to the merging of existing sub-national authorities into larger units, potentially a radical break with the past. Two separate mechanisms for institutional adjustment are envisaged in the reformed 2003 constitution; agreement between the elected representatives of two or more local authorities or popular assent through local referendums (Connétable, 2004). These provisions might one day produce varying institutional outcomes across France, on condition they are approved by the French parliament. Aside from pleas for the unification of historic regions such as Brittany,

Normandy, Savoy and Corsica, there were also arguments, notably by former President Giscard d'Estaing, for the creation of a few large regions to be comparable with German länder. In July 2003, however, voters in Corsica narrowly rejected in a referendum the proposition that a single regional authority should replace the existing Haut-Corse and Corse-Sud departments. A further reversal occurred in December 2003, when voters in Guadeloupe and Martinique rejected plans for more autonomy. To all extents and purposes, the special statute clause looked dead and buried.

The 2003 constitutional reform also introduced the possibility for the 'experimental transfer of functions', both across different levels of the French State and from the State to sub-national authorities. Experimentation needs to be understood on two levels: as an internal process of state reform and as an empowering of local and regional authorities. In terms of the organisation of the French State, the reform allows for more administrative decentralisation (Chavrier, 2004). Article 37/1 allows central ministries to transfer new functions to their territorial field services, coming close to admitting subsidiarity as a principle of the organisation of the State. Article 72 deals with transfers from the State to sub-national authorities. Any sub-national authority can now bid to exercise responsibilities in areas such as training, roads or airports that were previously in the policy domain of the central state or other public authorities such as the chambers of commerce. Not only can local and regional authorities bid to run new functions, they can also derogate themselves from providing services on a case by case



basis. These two articles (37/1 and 72) create the potential for expanding asymmetry between local authorities and within the French State.

The European dimension provides some further evidence of capacity building. Here is not the place to revisit the theory of multi-level governance that, whatever its merits, arguably places excessive importance on the linkages between the third (subnational) and first (supranational) levels (Majone, 2003; Smith, 1997). France has traditionally had one of the tightest, most state-centric forms of interaction with Brussels (Bulmer and Lequesne, 2005; Eyméri, 2003). At an official inter-governmental level, all interactions are supposed to be cleared by the SGCI, a bureaucratic unit attached to the Prime Minister's office. Another central state agency dependent upon the Prime Minister, the DATAR, co-ordinates local and regional bids for funding, in close liaison with the regional prefectures, the SGAR. In practice, bound by EU rules, the regional prefectures have associated the regional councils (especially) with the definition and the implementation of structural funds<sup>18</sup>. Since the passage of the 2004 decentralisation law, indeed, French regions have been allowed to bid to exercise complete control over the management of structural funds on an experimental basis (the first being Alsace). The direction of change is clear, even though French administrative and political elites continue to resist this development.

The French State context notwithstanding, there has been some development of local and regional capacity in the European sphere. The 1982 Act allowed French local and

regional authorities to set up offices in Brussels. Where they exist (as in the case Brittany/Pays de la Loire) these offices perform a restricted role, limited to information gathering, anticipation of future developments and organising meetings for local and regional politicians with the relevant officials from the Commission<sup>19</sup>. Unlike their counterparts in some countries, French sub-national offices have no access to diplomatic papers or officials. Local or regional politicians are not present in the Council working groups, nor do they represent France in intergovernmental committee structures (as the devolved authorities can do in the UK). The representation of France in Brussels remains, in comparative terms, a state-centric affair. If the institutional avenues for formal expression are modest, however, interviews uncovered a rich stream of more covert forms of influence.<sup>20</sup>

The above survey suggests that the logics of decentralisation are variable. In some areas, strong regional authorities have emerged as strategic co-ordinators and lead authorities; in others, powerful city governments are more innovative and influential than distant regions or subservient departments. In still others (especially rural and small town areas) central state-departmental alliances have continued relatively undisturbed. Taken together, however, these various dimensions of sub-national capacity building present a powerful counterweight to technocratic central steering as an explanation of the institutional and policy outcomes of decentralisation. We can summarise the development of capacity in terms of the growth of local and regional public spheres (François and Neveu, 1999; Cole and John, 1995; Cole, 1997). By local and regional public spheres are signified arenas within which a plurality of organisations interacts: local and regional

authorities, regional prefectures, the field services of central ministries, firms, associations and to lesser extent social partners. These arenas can contribute to developing local and regional capacity to the extent they can mobilise coherent territorial policy networks. The examples of Brittany and the Nord/Pas-de-Calais presented above illustrate that there is no iron law equating decentralised political institutions and the mobilisation of territorialized policy communities. But decentralisation has provided new institutional channels through which political, economic, associative and administrative actors can interact.

### **Decentralisation and identity construction**

Our *third hypothesis* is that decentralisation in France is shaped by new forms of identity-based territorial mobilisation. The heart of the minority nationalist/new regionalist argument is that almost everywhere there has been a revival of ethno-territorial identities and a challenge to the centralist model of the unitary state (de Winter, 1998, Keating, 1998, Loughlin, 2001, Moreno, 2005). Ethno-territorial identities reflect themselves in different party systems, language rights movements, cultural traditions or specific forms of elite accommodation. These arguments were developed to understand the union states of the United Kingdom and Spain, and later adapted to Belgium, Germany or Italy. Research into compound identities is much rarer in France. In the mainstream French Republican tradition, territorial (especially regional) or ethnic identities are considered a threat to a neutral public sphere that can alone guarantee political and civil rights

(Raymond, 2006). Researchers working in this area face numerous obstacles, as France does not allow the collection of statistical data on the basis of 'ethnic' or linguistic criteria, only those of nationality (Reverchon, 2005). In the one and indivisible Republic, there can only be one identity and one language.<sup>21</sup>

Our intuitive response is to reject the identity construction hypothesis. The examples of territorial asymmetry we explored above were linked to efficient service delivery, or to political entrepreneurship, not to identity politics. More robust attempts at introducing new forms of asymmetrical devolution in France have run against serious obstacles. The Matignon process undertaken by the Jospin government in 2001 was a bold attempt to introduce the principle of legislative asymmetry. This aborted process had envisaged transferring regulatory, then legislative powers to the Corsican Assembly, until the Council of State objected and the Constitutional Council ruled the process unconstitutional. Given its reaction to the Corsican example, it is highly likely that any attempt to derogate too seriously from the norm of uniformity will be resisted by the Council of State, the guardian of France's conservative public law tradition.

The French republican model emphasises formal equality and individual rights, rather than territorial equity and group identities (Levy, Cole and Le Galès, 2005). The history of regionalisation in France bears the imprint of the centralising French republican tradition. French regions were imagined as institutions without a link to territory (Balme, 1999, Nay, 1997, Pasquier,

2004, Zeller and Stussi, 2004). They were created in a standardised form throughout France, including in areas where no regional tradition existed. With the partial exception of Brittany and Corsica, France's historic regions and communities do not enjoy institutional expression. The Basque movement has so far failed in its minimal demand for a Basque department. There is a small electoral clientele for regionalism in Alsace, Savoy, Brittany, Normandy, the Basque country and French Catalonia. Regionalist or autonomist parties have occasionally elected representatives to local and regional councils, but they have found it difficult to operate independently of the main French parties (Ruane, Todd and Mandeville, 2003, Charette, 2005).

On the other hand, strong cultural, language and territorial defence movements have emerged since the 1970s (Cole and Williams, 2004). New forms of collective mobilisation have raised the status of the Breton, Occitan or Basque languages. Cultural regionalism has emerged as a powerful force in Brittany, the Basque country and Alsace, and to a lesser extent in Savoy, Normandy, Occitania, Flanders and French Catalonia (Chartier and Larvor, 2004). There has been a revival of regional cultural traditions, languages and historic identities.

The official resistance to recognising compound identities makes the French case an interesting one. For Moreno himself (2006), France provides the counter-example, the one case where the unitary state tradition has repressed particularistic identities and where there is a lack of correspondence

between territorial units and ‘natural’ identity communities. If compound identities feed into institution-building anywhere on the French mainland, they are likely to do so in Brittany, which we identify from the existing literature as the region in mainland France with the most distinctive sense of its own identity (Ford, 1993, Le Coadic, 1998, MacDonald, 1989, Nicolas, 1986, Pasquier, 2004). In theory, Brittany possesses key features identified by Moreno to develop an ‘ethno-territorial’ identity: a pre-state political existence<sup>22</sup>, an autonomist Breton political movement; a language rights movement, strong cultural traditions and specific forms of elite accommodation. Brittany is also one of the few regions where political institutions refer to a distinctive political region.<sup>23</sup> There is a complex pattern of multiple Breton identities and a willingness to envisage more advanced forms of political decentralisation than elsewhere in France (Le Coadic, 1998, Pillet, 2001). Brittany therefore provides a robust case for testing the importance and limitations of the relationship between territorial identities and political institutions; and for pinning down the sources of support for regional political institutions.

To investigate further a polling organisation was commissioned to carry out a survey in June 2001<sup>24</sup>. Findings will now be presented relating to compound identities and institutional preferences and a number of deductions will be made about regional/ethno-territorial politics and the political opportunity structure. We measured identity by using the Moreno scale, which asked respondents to situate themselves along a five-point continuum (‘Breton, not French, ‘more Breton than French, ‘As Breton as

French, 'More French than Breton, 'French, not Breton'), providing insights into their preferential mix of regional and national identities. The results of the Moreno question in Brittany are presented in Table 2.

---Table 2 around here ---

Brittany has the optimum identity spread: a powerful sense of territorial identity, which is easily accommodated within the framework of the existing French state. There is little perceived conflict between being Breton and being French: the median position ('As Breton as French') being the overwhelming favourite. On the other hand, our findings explode the myth that there is only one French identity: three-quarters of the survey declared themselves to feel at least as Breton as French. These findings back up the common perception that Brittany is a 'strong identity' region. Though the sense of regional identity is strong, however, this is not considered as being in opposition to an overarching French nationhood.

Brittany is also the birthplace of the idea of regional political institutions in France (Pasquier, 2004). The survey captured institutional preferences for the future in Brittany that are presented in Table 3. It reveals a strong demand in Brittany for consolidating or strengthening existing regional institutions, with a firm foundation of support for more enhanced forms of regional governance. Cross-tabulations demonstrate a convergence towards the median identity position - 'As Breton as French' - and support for

either retaining the existing regional institutions, or moving towards a more powerful regional body with legislative and tax varying powers <sup>25</sup>.

---Table 3 around here ---

What variables came into play when supporting these varying degrees of political autonomy? To obtain answers, we undertook logistic regression, with a view to elucidating differing attitudes to the hypothetical situations of political independence, full legislative devolution, limited devolution and opposition to any form of regional political institution. <sup>26</sup> A number of independent variables were identified, such as age, gender, education and place of birth. The attitudinal and opinion variables of identity, aptitude in the Breton languages, preferred level of decision for policies and intended voting behaviour in a regional and general election were also included.

Table 4 provides the logistic regression estimates for Brittany.

-Table 4 around here –

A number of conclusions emerge. There is a significant relationship between the intensity of feelings of identity and support for independence (the small proportion of the Breton, not French group being much more favourable to independence than any other). But the small numbers of respondents falling into this category urges caution. Other identity markers are less obviously correlated with support for political autonomy or enhanced decentralisation. Counter-intuitively, there is a negative



relationship between Breton language competency and support for independence or for enhanced forms of devolution. This finding backs up the traditional literature in the field, emphasising a lingering sense of shame and inferiority amongst native Breton speakers (almost by definition in the oldest age categories) and an over-compensation of loyalty to France and the French state (Hoare, 2000).

Moreno identifies the other identity markers for stateless nations as those of political movements, cultural movements and elite accommodation. Support for decentralisation in Brittany is not a function of a powerful nationalist party. Though Brittany has a rich variety of small nationalist political organisations, political nationalism in Brittany has been a marginal political (as opposed to cultural) force and has exercised little agenda-setting influence. The main Breton ‘ethnic-territorial’ party, the Breton Democratic Union (Union démocratique bretonne - UDB), has a real but limited presence. The Breton cultural movement has been very powerful, on the other hand, performing an agenda setting role in matters of bilingual education, cultural investment, the environment and the regional media. Our survey uncovered broad public support for measures to assist the Breton cultural movement, with strong majorities agreeing that Breton-medium cultural associations and media should be part-financed from public funds. There is clearly a latent Breton consciousness, kept alive by a dense network of cultural associations that might, in other circumstances, provide the basis for a distinctive ethno-territorial party.<sup>27</sup>

This latent Breton consciousness is not a political resource that can be mobilised by any of the existing regionalist or nationalist parties such as the UDB (Cole, 2006b). The political and discursive opportunity structures in contemporary France are forbidding for explicit ethno-territorial politics or parties. Breton influence manifests itself most effectively at the level of elite accommodation. Brittany is a region with a strong identity, whose elites have become accustomed to operating in the broader French State (and European Union) context. As a region, Brittany is replete with paradoxes. There is a widespread demand for more powerful regional political institutions within public opinion, and an even stronger demand amongst regional politicians. But Breton regional politicians also occupy important positions within all the leading French parties. In the real world of French politics, Breton politicians concentrate their primary efforts on Paris. An element of ambiguity is calculated to serve Brittany's interests. Playing up Breton identity encourages the central state to channel scarce resources to its peripheral region. Brittany's political elite has thus adapted to the French logic of territorial decentralisation, while framing political interactions at least in part in regional terms. Breton political capacity is real, but it is only partially articulated through the regional political institution created by the 1982 Decentralisation Act. The institutional and political structures of opportunities have emphasised the conquest of national (French) power, and this has only partially been called into question with decentralisation.

## **Discussion and conclusions**

The article set out to evaluate the relative importance of state reform, local and regional capacity building and territorial identities as explanatory variables for understanding decentralisation in France. The first conclusion is that decentralisation in France needs to be read at different levels: in terms of actor motivations, institutional and policy outputs and political and partisan processes. The hypothesis of steering at a distance captures well the motivations of key central state actors and the perceptions of these motivations from those operating at the micro- and meso-level. The capacity building hypothesis has less to say about motivations, but rather more about institutional and policy outcomes, and captures the iterative processes at work in local and regional capacity building. The identity construction hypothesis elucidates how ethno-territorial political processes can, in certain circumstances, impact upon the functioning of devolved political institutions.

Each hypothesis can draw some support from the evidence presented. The third hypothesis - that decentralisation in France is shaped by new forms of identity-based territorial mobilisation - is the weakest. Political movements based on territorial identity do exist in France, but they have been unsuccessful in shaping institutional responses, except arguably in Corsica. Even in a strong identity region such as Brittany, regional advocacy has been promoted through the existing French political parties, rather than by nationalist or regionalist alternatives (Cole and Loughlin, 2003). Though a distinctive form of sub-national governance has evolved in France, its precise form has been shaped by the opportunities provided and constraints

imposed by the unitary state form. Unitary states can accommodate pragmatic policy differentiation, hence the move to a French-style local and regional governance since the early 1980s. But they allow much less scope for the construction of autonomous territorial-institutional futures than in union states, such as the United Kingdom and Spain, or in federations such as Belgium.

Our first hypothesis - that of steering at a distance – is very seductive. Writers such as Sadran (1992) and Mabileau (1997) argue convincingly that contractual processes and partnerships are consistent with French top-down administrative traditions, whereby the state gives a lead, but relies on local authorities and other partners to finance and implement policy programmes. The central state intervenes directly in territorial management in the form of steering the State-Region and other public policy contracts. The French State retains enormous regulatory and fiscal powers and remains deeply involved in local and regional affairs. From the perspective of the central state, political and administrative decentralisation can produce beneficial fiscal and functional effects, improve public policies and shift blame. Shedding inflationary social assistance policies, for example, can allow more strategic thinking at the centre and offload tax increases onto local authorities. It is quite possible to interpret the decentralisation reforms of the 1982-83 and 2003-04 as little more than a by-product of the perennial effort to reform the state.

Rather than crude central steering, however, the article has contended that meso-level governance in contemporary France is characterised by more

interdependent forms of policy-making. The local and regional governance literature, with its disparate focus upon public–private synergies, multi-level interactions, territoriality, experimentation and organisational decentralisation, best captures the complexity uncovered throughout the article (Le Galès, 2002, Loughlin, 2001, John, 2001, Pierre, 2000, Gaudin, 1999, 2002). We do not embrace the multi-level governance approach per se, but the article has presented some evidence that local and regional players are focussing upon new institutional arenas and building novel trans-national relationships to by-pass tight state controls. In most respects, however, the EU system of governance is based around supranational institutions and member-states, not the territorial substrata thereof.

In defence of the second hypothesis, decentralisation must be read as a process, not a single event. Local and regional capacity building has both an iterative and a cognitive dimension. Local and regional authorities have become entrepreneurial as they have gained experience and confidence. Local and regional authorities have learnt from their own past errors, as well as from comparing their own experiences in policy fields such as education, welfare and transport. Interviewees repeatedly referred to the emulative effect produced by decentralisation, as sub-national authorities attempt to build better schools or improve the economic attractiveness of their localities, departments or regions. Our preferred second hypothesis does not facilitate drawing neat conclusions that are equally valid across the country. The weight of local and regional variables depends upon precise configurations that vary across France. Political arrangements must be

understood within the context of local (and sometimes regional) political traditions, social dynamics and economic change. On balance, however, such a complex and variable pattern responds best to the reality of contemporary governance and is a more accurate representation of decentralisation than either central state steering or identity-based mobilisation.

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<sup>1</sup> The fieldwork upon which this article is based was carried out in a series of funded research projects from 1994 onwards. A small number of elite interviews (10) in 2004 and 2005 formed part of the ‘Governing and Governance in France’ project financed by the British Academy (LRG-37213). I thank the British Academy for its support. A much larger number of interviews - 75 – and a comparative opinion survey were carried out in 2001-2002 as part of the ‘Devolution and Decentralisation in Wales and Brittany’ project, funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council (Grant number L 219 25 2007). The ESRC also funded an earlier project – ‘Local Policy networks in Britain and France’ (Grant number L311253047), which involved around 100 interviews from 1994-1996. I am indebted to the council for its support. All interviewees were guaranteed anonymity and for ethical reasons no interviewee is mentioned by name. The following organisations were particularly useful: Association DIWAN, Brittany Chamber of Commerce, Brittany Cultural Council, Brittany Economic and Social Chamber, Brittany Regional Council, Brittany Regional Prefecture (SGAR), the DATAR (Paris), the Education ministry (in Paris, Brittany, Nord-Pas-de-Calais), Euralille mixed economy society, Ille-et-Vilaine département, Ille-et-Vilaine prefecture, the Industry ministry (DRIRE) in Nord-Pas-de-Calais and Brittany; the Infrastructure ministry (in Paris, Nord), the Interior ministry (in Paris), the Labour and Training ministry (in Brittany), Lille Métropole Urban Development Agency (ADUML), the mayors and/or adjoints of Acigné, Carhaix, Cesson-Sevigné,

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la Chapelle des Fougeretz, Chateaugiron, Fâches-Thumesnil, Lorient, Lambersart, Lille, Nantes, Rennes, Roubaix, Saint Grégoire, St Jacques, Tourcoing, Wasquehal and Wavrin; National Assembly, Nord département prefecture; Nord département; Nord/Pas-de-Calais Regional Council; Nord/Pas-de-Calais Regional prefecture; Pays de la Loire Regional Council, Research and Technology directorate (DRRT) in Brittany and Nord/Pas-de-Calais, SEMAEB (Brittany), Senate and the Youth and Sports ministry (in Brittany).

<sup>2</sup> Syndicat intercommunal à vocation unique

<sup>3</sup> Syndicat intercommunal à vocation multiple

<sup>4</sup> Établissement public de coopération intercommunale

<sup>5</sup> Interviews in the DATAR, 2005, the Interior ministry, 2005, and the Infrastructure ministry (Paris), 2004.

<sup>6</sup> Interviews in the DRIRE, 1995 and the Infrastructure ministry (Nord department), 1995

<sup>7</sup> Interview in the DATAR, 2005

<sup>8</sup> Interviews in the Infrastructure ministry (Lille and Paris), 1995, 2004

<sup>9</sup> The University 2000 programme during the 1990s was a particular case in point. Across France, local and regional authorities built new universities in partnership with the central state. Ambitious regions, such as those in Nord/Pas-de-Calais and Brittany, enthusiastically participated, viewing the process in terms of institutional legitimisation.

<sup>10</sup> In Nord/Pas-de-Calais, a number of interviewees complained that the 1994-1999 State-Region plan was used to force the regional council to invest in road-building programmes, though they have no legal responsibility for roads. In Brittany, on the other hand, the regional council itself insisted that the road building programme should be the main priority of the plan.

<sup>11</sup> A theme emphasised in interviews in the Education ministry (Paris) in 1999 and 2004.

<sup>12</sup> In the 1994-1999 round, for example, the Brittany regional council refused to agree to the State's demand that it co-finance old-age people's homes, which did not fall within its competencies (interview). Ambitious regional councils can pressurise the State to contractualise in areas it had not

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envisaged, such as the example of roads given above. In Nord-Pas-de-Calais, in 1994 the Nord departmental council quite simply refused to participate in the State-Region planning process.

<sup>13</sup> Reported in Le Monde, 13 December 2002.

<sup>14</sup> Notably in the Brittany regional council majority, then governed by the UMP.

<sup>15</sup> These themes were repeated often in interviews in 1994-95 and 2001-2.

<sup>16</sup> Interviews in ADUML, Rennes-Métropole, SEMAEB and Nord-Pas-de-Calais développement.

<sup>17</sup> Interviews in SEMAEB, SEM Euralille

<sup>18</sup> Interviews in the SGAR in Brittany (1995) and Nord/Pas-de-Calais (1994)

<sup>19</sup> Interviews in the Bretagne/Pays de la Loire European Office, Brussels, 2004.

<sup>20</sup> One interlocutor referred at length to the informal linkages between Breton local authorities and well-placed Bretons within the Commission, praising the helpful role of Commission officials in the preparing urban dossiers.

<sup>21</sup> The census does not collect information on how many people speak languages others than French, which, in article 2 of the French constitution, is the only language of the Republic.

<sup>22</sup> First an independent monarchy (845-938), then a Duchy (from 938 to 1532), then a French province with special prerogatives (1532-1789), reduced for long to being a collection of disparate départements before becoming an administrative (1972) then political region (1982), modern Brittany is a French region with a difference

<sup>23</sup> . The term 'region', as applied to Brittany, is ambiguous as it can refer to both the institution embodied in the current regional council with its four departments (Côtes-d'Armor, Finistère, Ille-et-Vilaine and Morbihan) and to the geographically wider historic 'region', including the Loire Atlantique département, corresponding more or less to the ancient Duchy of Brittany. The survey to which this article refers was carried out in the area covered by the existing region, known sometimes as B4.

<sup>24</sup> Efficiencie 3 interviewed a representative sample of 1007 individuals, selected by quotas of age, gender, socio-economic group and locality. Interviews were by telephone, using the CATI method. The dataset produced by the survey consists of 1007 cases and 60 variables (Cole, 2004). The dataset is divided into socio-demographic and attitudinal variables. The socio-demographic variables are those of region, locality, gender, occupation of the chief income earner, level of education, country of birth, intended vote in a general (parliamentary) election, intended vote in a Regional Council election; working status; time spent in Brittany; age; marital status; children in full time education and level of



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interest in politics. Most of the survey material is in the form of detailed analysis of *attitudinal and opinion variables* on matters relating to decentralisation, Breton identity and attitudes (preferences) towards issues of the Breton language, education and training. The principal attitudinal questions investigate views on decentralisation in Brittany; the ‘Moreno’ identity scale; the Loire-Atlantique and the administrative region of Brittany, views on the performance of the Brittany Regional Council; future expenditure priorities; preferences for regional political institutions; relations between the Brittany Regional Council and similar bodies elsewhere in Europe; understanding of the Breton language; views on the Breton language; public policy and the Breton language; decision-making arenas and the Breton language; Breton language in schools; attendance at a training course in the past 24 months; priorities for spending money on training in Brittany; decision-making arenas and training in Brittany; priorities for improving the training of young people and attitudes towards the importance of qualifications against employment aged 16 and above.

<sup>25</sup> The ‘As Breton as French’ group, which represented 57 per cent of respondents, divided its preferences as follows: ‘retain the existing regional council’ (42.2 per cent); ‘give the regional council law-making and tax varying powers’ (36.4 per cent); an independent Brittany (10.1 per cent), don’t know (9 per cent) and abolish the regional council (2.3 per cent).

<sup>26</sup> The data are based on 1007 individuals in Brittany aged 16 and above. Interviews were carried out in June 2001. The survey was divided roughly into four parts, corresponding to our research questions: namely, attitudes to political institutions, to language, to education and training issues, as well as socio-demographic characteristics. For the purposes of establishing relationships, we recoded our data to develop multivariate models of institutional preference. We ran logistic regression to explain individual support for each of the possible institutional situations. In Brittany, we extrapolated four different dependent variables from our institutional scale. We coded these as : 1. ‘independent Brittany’, 0 ‘others’ (“independence” column in table); 1 ‘Regional Council with law making and taxation powers’, 0 ‘others’ (“Regional Council with extended competencies” column); 1 ‘Regional Council with limited law-making and taxation powers’, 0 ‘others’ (“Regional Council with limited competencies” column); ‘no regional Council’, 0 ‘others’ (“No Regional Council” column). We selected the independent variables of age (3 ‘16-24 years’, 2 ‘25-44 years’, 1 ‘45 years and more’), gender (0 ‘male’, 1 ‘female’), education (1 ‘lowest or no degree’ to 6 ‘upper degree’), place of birth (0 ‘other’, 1

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'Brittany'), identity (1 'Breton not French', 2 'More Breton than French', 3 'equally Breton and French', 4 'More French than Breton', 5 'French not Breton'), language (0 'not Breton speaker', 1 'Breton speaker'), level of decision for language and training (0 'other', 1 'Brittany') and voting behaviour (1 'UDF', 2 'Socialist party', 3 'RPR', 4 'Regionalist party').

<sup>27</sup> In the case of Brittany, support for the independence option was strongly correlated with age, gender, education and, to a lesser extent, place of birth. The youngest Bretons, especially those born in Brittany, the most educated people and women were the most inclined to support independence.