

CALL FOR CONTRIBUTIONS  
FOR A THEMATIC ISSUE OF THE *REVUE TRAVAIL ET EMPLOI*

**Field experiments and public policies in work and employment:  
recent contributions and perspectives**

The fund for youth experiments (L'Horty and Petit, 2010) created in 2008 reflects the growth of field experiments in France. For the first time, a number of randomized trials<sup>1</sup> have been conducted, stimulated by the recent reaction to the work on poverty of J-PAL (Banerjee and Duflo, 2009). This has developed particularly in the fields of work and employment and especially in socio-economic integration. Of course it is too early to be able to see the future evolution to which this fund may lead but it is a first class observation point. It has financed hundreds of experiments which may be precursors to the way in which policies develop in the future.

Work and employment policies are amongst those that have been the most studied and influenced by these methods. This is no doubt because they are more decentralized as compared to education, for example, where the tradition of randomized experiments is more limited.<sup>2</sup> But randomized experiments have a long, and multidisciplinary, history (medicine, psychology, sociology, economy, etc.) which goes well beyond current events. Experiments on the impact of public policies in the United States received an enthusiastic response in the 1960s. The project of an “experimenting society” (Monnier, 1992) had resulted in the implementation of programs, particularly those concerning employment policy (Allègre, 2008), involving thousands of people and considerable sums of money (hundreds of millions of dollars). This first rise of experimentation ebbed in the 1980s before today’s renewed wave of interest amongst economists.

The relationship between experiments and the societies in which they take place is a determinant factor. In order to understand the processes at work, these methods should be placed in the historical, political, disciplinary and legal context within which they arose and developed. Thus, the introduction of experiments in France entailed a change in the juridical framework (Gomel and Serverin, 2009). The experiments involved a variety of actors — public administration, elected officials, research organizations, associations, private companies and consulting firms—the “subjects” of the experiments. It is important to consider in what way these different actors utilized these experiments and indeed whether or not they utilized them at all, as well as to look at the interaction between the evaluation’s sponsors and the evaluators. The latter, especially when part of the academic world, are expected to play a role for which their experience has generally left them unprepared: deciding what “works” or “does not work” or recommending the generalization, the transformation or the removal of pilot projects. How they live and manage the gap between this role and their scientific legitimacy deserves an analysis in its own right.

This call has two main objectives:

The first is to **highlight the contributions of several recent experiments** (randomized or not) **in the field of work and employment**. Articles presenting original empirical research will emphasize the contribution and specific limits of the experimental context and will present their results in the framework of the theoretical or empirical literature on the subject. They will also define the conditions within which the experiments were elaborated and how they developed. In particular, where there are suitable tested devices, the authors will analyze their results to see if they provide answers to the questions initially raised by the sponsors and what measures might be taken to rigorously address them. Accounts describing the origins, the development and the possible deviations and detours of one or another experiment are welcome, including those for incomplete projects.

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<sup>1</sup> This is also called controlled experimentation and comes from medical clinical trials in which groups are randomly selected. The policies to be evaluated are applied to one of these groups (the experimental group) and not to the other (the control group). The results are defined by the comparison of the two groups.

<sup>2</sup> See for example, Cook (2002).

The second objective is to **study experimentation with an historical and reflexive view of these methods, to stimulate a dialog between various fields concerning a methodology cutting across all the social sciences.**

As such, articles on the following (non-exhaustive) list of topics in the field of work and employment are welcome:

- On what body of epistemological, theoretical, disciplinary hypotheses are experiments based? What escapes these experiments?
- How do they influence public policy and research? What is the role of experiments in relation to other approaches to the evaluation of public policies?
- Comparative perspectives between the recent development of experimentation in France and other examples of such development (cf., for example, the experiments in North America in the 1960s); comparative perspectives between experiments in the North as well as in the South. Articles which aim at clarifying the influence of the institutional (including juridical) and social context on the practice and utilization of experiments (international comparisons) are welcome.
- The social construction of experiments: the role of the actors who promote and practice these experiments; the social and political stresses, interactions, tensions, assumptions, any resistance in the field. What are the factors which lead to the scientific and political success of experiments, but also to the fact that some projects were aborted or redefined? What are experiments' relations to policies and underlying expertise?

### **How to respond**

- Contributors are invited to first present a proposal of approximately 5,000 to 7,000 characters (three to four pages) for an article clearly presenting the research question under study, the materials and analytical tools used, and the expected results. The call is open to proposals from researchers from different disciplines (economy, sociology, law, etc.) and working from quantitative and/or qualitative methods. It is also open to investigations in other countries in order to better understand any national specificity of these questions.

- These proposals should be sent by email as an attachment to the editors of the review [travail.emploi@dares.travail.gouv.fr](mailto:travail.emploi@dares.travail.gouv.fr) and copied to [philippe.zamora@ensae.fr](mailto:philippe.zamora@ensae.fr) and to [agnes.labrousse@u-picardie.fr](mailto:agnes.labrousse@u-picardie.fr) by **14<sup>th</sup> May 2012 at the latest**. Authors whose projects are likely to be integrated in this thematic dossier will then send their **complete paper by 31<sup>st</sup> October 2012**.

### **References**

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- Banerjee, A.V. and Duflo, E. (2009), "The Experimental Approach to Development Economics," *Annual Review of Economics*, Vol. 1: pp. 151–78. In French: "L'approche expérimentale en économie du développement," *Revue d'économie politique*, 119, 5, pp. 691–726.
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- Monnier, E. (1992), *Evaluations de l'action des pouvoirs publics. Du projet au bilan*, Economica, Paris, 2 éd., 245 p.