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### ***When the wise man points at the moon, the political sociologist looks at the finger. Embedded research in an EU think and do tank on childhood obesity prevention***

**Thomas ALAM**

*Senior lecturer in political science*

*CERAPS – Lille Center for Politics – Université de Lille*

[thomas.alam-3@univ-lille2.fr](mailto:thomas.alam-3@univ-lille2.fr)

*We have been instrumented by the food industry to some extent, notably by the [confédération des industries agroalimentaires européennes] (...) which has largely used Epode (...) in order to claim “Epode has to be developed (...) because it is the best way ; the solution has nothing to do with the taxation of our products”. (...) It was very embarrassing because we were seen as the Trojan horse of the food industry (Dr Jean-Michel Borys, Interview, Paris, 23rd February 2009).*

My communication builds on an original fieldwork since I was involved a few years ago (end of 2008-2011) in a so-called European “think and do tank” (Epode European Network - EEN) meant to “disseminate best practices” regarding health promotion and childhood obesity prevention (the Epode programme). Although I finally turned out to be an “embedded researcher” (Alam, Gurruchaga, O’Miel 2012), my main mission was to build up “recommendations” for the Work Package on Public Private Partnerships (PPP), allegedly one of Epode’s four “pillars”. I worked for the EEN (under high financial dependency) and, simultaneously, on the EEN (especially, as I eventually got a permanent academic position at university), until the closing Symposium in April 2011. Driven by managerial (heteronomous) questions, I produced a chapter on PPPs mostly based on face-to-face interviews and survey of the literature that was part of a bigger book of recommendations (Borys et al. 2011). Besides, I have been reflecting on this experience to highlight the heuristic virtue of “ethnopraxis” (Wacquant 2004, 2005) since being an insider in the EEN allowed me to experience in practice what it meant to be an expert and produce knowledge in a think tank (and how different it is from being a social scientist, Alam 2011, 2016). Away from enchanted expert discourses or denunciative ones, on public private partnerships for health, I have basically resorted to “observing participation” to build up a micro-sociological and monographical study as I had access to numerous work meetings, symposia and

congresses, complemented by 34 semi-structured interviews in France, Belgium, Spain and Britain and by document analysis. In other words, my entry in the world of think tanks rests on a very specific case which I study from an inductive, micro-sociological and distanced way while taking full advantage of “ethnopraxis”.

Just like any firm, think tanks spend time “marketing their products” (Abelson 2009 : 77). As such, far from being a “university without students” (Weaver 1989 : 564), a place where independent, original and disinterested thoughts are produced, the EEN is clearly oriented towards the repetition of a simple message: Epode is a success whose best practices should be transferred. Hence the insistence of EEN directors on being a *think and do tank*, an activist profile to be poised against more scholarly think tanks or “ink tanks” (Stone 2007 : 262). As such, the EEN is perhaps closer to an “advocacy tank” since it is highly connected to interest groups and combines “a strong policy, partisan or ideological bent with aggressive salesmanship and an effort to influence current policy debates” (Weaver 1989 : 567). As highlighted by Thomas Medvetz’s structural perspective on US think tanks, the EEN is a good example of this new space of action at the crossroads of the political, academic, media and business sphere (Medvetz 2012). The EEN, funded by Mars, Ferrero, Orangina-Schweppes and Nestlé and the European Commission illustrates how different social worlds (politics, academia, business and media) are being connected as well as who are the brokers of “organised philanthropy” (Zunz 2012), specialised in corporate engagement (in-house lobbyists, public affairs professionals, head of food quality or nutrition, head of external communication, secretary of foundations...).

**Frame 1. EEN partners in 2008**



I believe my insider's position in the think tank offers a highly relevant insight into this interstitial field. As I observed certain interdependent social games which are developing in multi-level scenes that are not clearly perceptible behind window display, I give account of the complexity of collusive transactions (Dobry 1986) where each actor finds specific interests in the exchange. As I entered the black box of think tanks to produce recommendations, I build on this first-hand experience to focus on rather discrete actors, here communications consultants, held as brokers (Nay and Smith 2002) and entrepreneurs of philanthropic mobilisations. Entrepreneurs because they own the programme and are invested in the coordination of private policy networks. Brokers because they are at the crossroad of philanthropic flows (gifts in cash, material or non-material resources) consented by private actors to confront a public problem. Incidentally, they share with corporate sponsors (industrial groups or company foundations) a whole set of beliefs regarding the efficacy of State's policies, and like philanthropists "oppose to the sole vote legitimacy, the legitimacy of expertise" (Lambelet 2014: 17) – an expertise that is managerial and numbered<sup>1</sup>.

Is Epode the "creature of the food industry", truly the main sponsor of the programme<sup>2</sup>? This discourse is at the heart of the enigma insofar as it is structuring within this philanthropic network. As we shall see, the modalities of the programme and the framing of obesity it supports, are appropriate for the food industry's self presentation. No doubt the programme is a "de-responsabilising" and "diverting" instrument that adds up to the long list of case studies on "agnotology" (Proctor 2011, Déplaud 2014). Having said that, I will not take side on this issue and will depart from basic analyses in terms of hidden agenda. Indeed, the net of philanthropic relationships is so dense and intertwined, the configuration is so moving, that the very idea of letting the cat out of the bag is a sweet illusion, since each partner can derive specific profits from these transactions. However, such as discourse – so central in the process of disqualification targeting the programme – is clearly a stigma (see the epigraph). And corporate sponsors constantly strive to adjust to this stigma, for instance when they try and internalise the "health and social critique" through "institutional communication" and "Corporate Social Responsibility" (see Chiapello on capitalism's internalisation of the environmental critique).

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<sup>1</sup> The terms used by Mars Europe's *Health and Human nutrition manager* underlined a clear disdain regarding public programmes and reveal to what extent the public and corporate professional cultures are mismatched : « *The PNNS is such a hodgepodge [saupoudrage] ! I belong to the regional programme on health and nutrition, but every year, it... makes me sick because we have a budget but it is sprinkled on very tiny activities (...). Pfff... I do believe that a concerted action that is implemented with a snowball effect is much more efficient than loosely connected actions (...). In addition, there is no follow-up ! (...). The PNNS presents its annual report, claims it is awesome. It sells it very well by the way in other European Member States but, eventually, we are not sure that it is really delivering results! (...) Well, I am not convinced at all. [Whereas with Epode], it is a bit like a religion (...), they all share the same faith in what they do* » (entretien, Paris, 26 octobre 2009). In a similar vein, the EEN co-director countlessly stated her critiques towards the nanny State or State intervention in terms of diet and public health : « We are speaking loud and clear. We do not belong to the non-profit sector. If it was not a sustainable product, we would not invest. (...) the Communist system or the Kibbutz system has shown that it did not work better ». With confusion, she also stated that consumer choices should be driven by market signals since « the invisible hand of the State (*sic.*) telling people what to buy in the supermarket does not work » (Notes de terrain, réunion du comité PPP de l'EEN, 24 octobre 2008, Paris)..

<sup>2</sup> Quite significantly, the interview with Tim Lobstein, a key figure of the consumerist world on food issues and director of the *International Association for the Study of Obesity* started this way: "so tell me what does Nestlé want to know?" (Interview, IASO office, London, 28/07/2009)

As such, communications consultants are key players in what is a central practice of contemporary philanthropy, i. e. justifying and legitimising its action, giving birth to a “scientific”, “pragmatic” and “evidence-based” philanthropy (Lefèvre, Charbonneau 2011). No matter if those consultants, those “salesmen of promises” (Villette 2003: 87), believe in their myth. Focusing on the Protéines agency, the Epode programme and the think tank I was involved in, I illustrate the role of science in building up the “public transcript” (Scott 1990) and in helping these brokers spreading the faith. To be more accurate, I will carefully focus on activities of “monstration” – in his dual sense of “showing” and “opposite of demonstration”(Alam, Godard 2007: 92) – in which the repertoire of expertise and the register of internationalization are mutually reinforcing. This is the essence of the “boundary work” activities (Gieryn 1983, Eyal 2013) that can be observed in the EEN and that are so instrumental in the interstitial field of think tanks.

## **BETWEEN PHILANTHROPY AND AGNOTOLOGY : ADVOCATING THE CAUSE AND BUILDING THE SOLUTION**

To understand the philanthropic engagement towards Epode at the intersection between fields, I will first briefly underline the programme’s characteristics regarding the political structures of opportunities (Lambelet 2014 : chap. 2). With the agenda setting of obesity at all levels of government, Epode appears so well adjusted to the interests of the food industry (today Epode’s main sponsor) that one is wondering whether it is not the main beneficiary of these philanthropic flows.

### ***Epode : the dissemination of a « miracle solution » ?***

As it is narrated by its initiator, the Epode story originates in San Francisco, where Dr Jean-Michel Borys discovered a health education programme against cholesterol<sup>3</sup>. This so called “health community” programme is an inspiration for implementing a project in Fleurbaix and Laventie (two wealthy rural cities in northern France). As a medical doctor and endocrinologist specialised on nutrition and diabetes working in the area, Dr JM Borys actively contributed to the setting up of the Fleurbaix-Laventie Ville Santé project. Around a loi 1901 association (association FLVS) created in 1992 and within a scientific committee, he managed to gather supports from academics (Professeurs d’Université-Praticiens Hospitaliers at the Lille Centre hospitalo-universitaire, CHU, and at the Assistance Publique – Hôpitaux de Paris, INSERM epidemiologists... ) who are driving the evaluation of this scientific research<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> This programme was initiated by Fred Mayer and PPSI (*Pharmacists Planning Services, Inc.*) Mark A. Stein, « Sausalito Takes a Hearty Swipe at Cholesterol », *Los Angeles Times*, 9 décembre 1988.

<sup>4</sup> Apart from the authors of scientific publications (see below), FLVS benefited from the active support of Pr Pierre Fossati who, at the time, was head of the nutrition department at the CHU de Lille (where JM Borys intervened as consultant) but also a heavy-weight of the Société Française de Nutrition.

For several reasons, FLVS was essentially funded by the corporate sector. Right from the start, the project rested on an NGO, corporate sponsors<sup>5</sup> and a communication agency (Nutrika created by JM Borys and the actual DG of Protéines Groupe<sup>6</sup>), which ensures the project coordination, fundraising and connected services on health communication for partner companies<sup>7</sup>.

FLVS sketched a « global preventive approach » targeting children, that first involved teachers, schools and General Practitioners, then enlarged to new actors (sport and leisure associations, grocers, local representatives, etc.). Several FLVS publications, notably in *Public Health Nutrition* (Romon et al. 2009), allegedly demonstrate a significant decrease among childhood obesity and overweight. Fantastic news for the programme as it has been upgraded since 2004 into a national Epode programme (Ensemble, Prévenons l'Obésité de nos Enfants).

In the meantime, in 1998, Nutrika merged with Protéines, a Paris-based communication agency specialised in health and corporate communications and whose clients mostly belong to the food industry (MacDonald's, Nestlé, Danone, Ferrero, Coca-Cola, etc.). It is an opportunity to turn the FLVS study into public policy in 10 pioneer cities in France in 2004 then in almost 250 towns in 2010. More, Epode's "dissemination" in Europe and across the world often serves as a proxy for claiming it is a « success story » : Viasano (Belgium), Thao (Spain), Paediatrofi (Greece) at the end of the first decade of 2000, then OPAL (South Australia), 5 Pasos (Mexico), JOGG (Netherlands), SETS (Romania), Healthy Kids (Bulgaria), MAIA (Portugal), Epode Canada, Eligire Vive Sano (Chile), etc. Epode International Network – an AISBL (association internationale sans but lucratif) created in Belgium in 2011 but driven in effect by Protéines agency – now claims on its website to have united 43 obesity prevention programmes resorting to the Epode methodology (target population, social marketing, similar governing structures resorting to communication agencies, public-private partnerships at all levels...). Protéines agency is at the heart of this network since it has registered the Epode trademark and associated concepts which generates in turn interesting royalties.

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<sup>5</sup> Fournier Pharma, Boehringer Mannheim Diagnostics, Roche, Knoll BASF Pharma, Tepral for the pharmaceutical industry as well as Nestlé, Lesieur, the Cedus (Centre d'études et de documentation du sucre) and Go sport.

<sup>6</sup> Camille Harel, « Serge Michels et Virgine Becquart nommés à la gouvernance de Protéines », *LSA*, 17 avril 2014.

<sup>7</sup> Entretien Jean-Michel Borys, restaurant, Porte de Champeret, Paris, 23 février 2009.

## ***An institutional and business context suitable for philanthropic engagement***

As for any collective action, if one wants to understand philanthropic investment on obesity and overweight, one has to start with the structure of political opportunities. As such, the last 20 years are characterised by the formalising of obesity prevention policies in Northern countries. In the wake of the new Millennium, a « moral crusade » is initiated in the USA (Larchet 2015) with the help of WHO whose experts modified in 1997 the BMI-related definition of overweight before qualifying obesity as a worldwide epidemics (Poulain 2009, Larchet 2015, Pestana 2015 and, among the many publications from the field of Fat Studies : Campos *et al.* 2006, Saguy 2013). This worldwide campaign may have had counter-productive effects (blaming the victims who are implicitly held as responsible for their condition) but also gave rise to a new framing of the issue: obesity and overweight are not only related to individual behaviours but also to a political and social environment that includes the food supply and the promotion of fatty food in particular. As the British government experiments « front-of-pack labelling » with traffic lights, the 2004 loi de santé publique forbids vending machines that sell sweets and sodas in French high schools and regulates further food advertising (Bossy 2009, Grossetête 2015). According to Corporate Europe Observatory, the food industry would have spent nearly a billion euros between 2006 and 2010 in lobbying against Regulation 1169/2011 on the Provision of Food Information to Consumers (Kurzer, Cooper, 2013).

Yet the food industry is also “pro-active” as it voluntarily engages in philanthropic strategies so as to be “part of the solution, not only of the problem” (interview, senior lobbyist for Nestlé, Paris, 26 October 2009). In doing so, it meets the support of legitimate international organisations which – due to beliefs and/or lack of legal competencies – are interested in the widespread promotion of « self-regulation », known in Brussels as « horizontal subsidiarity ». WHO and the European Commission – in large part followed by national strategies – support the development of public-private partnerships (WHO Europe, 2006 : 2; European Commission, 2007 : 4). But there is more, Corporate Social Responsibility<sup>8</sup> is now partaking of an ethical supply coming from the business world (Salmon 2004). Whether it concerns groups (Ferrero, Orangina-Schweppes, Mars, Kellog’s, Danone...) or foundations (Fondation Internationale Carrefour, Fondation Nestlé France, The Coca Cola Foundation...), CSR is on every pages of their annual reports or groups’ social audits – in which Epode holds a significant position<sup>9</sup>. This corporate literature stresses the elected affinities between CSR and the business case. For quite a while, well known brands such as Body Shop or Ben & Jerry’s have been pretending they have merged their ethical concerns with their marketing campaigns (Stauber, Rampton 2012 : 229 et s.). Such companies are now being followed by heavy-weights of the sector which communicate on the re-

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<sup>8</sup> Leading company heralding corporate ethical commitment, Nestlé’s lobbyists favour the concept of « Creation of Shared Value », to distinguish themselves from the « Corporate Social Bullshit » followed by competitors.

<sup>9</sup> Nestlé’s historical supporting of the FLVS association appears on several occasions in the Livre Blanc de la Fondation Nestlé France created in 2008. The development and success of Epode – which « is today a model, not only in France, but also in Europe – embody one of the foundation’s main axis (« L’éducation », p. 86-87). Two pages are devoted to Epode in the Fondation internationale Carrefour’s 2008 annual report out of 24 pages, a lot of which do not have much text. Out of 5 millions euros of subsidies allocated to over 30 programmes worldwide, 310 000 euros are allocated to Epode in Europe (125 000 € for France, 75 000 € for Spain, 50 000 € for Belgium and 60 000 € for Greece).

focusing of their business perspective towards the health of consumers<sup>10</sup>. This transition is strongly encouraged by business publications certifying to what extent that strategy is economically relevant, such as *A recipe for success* signed by the International Business Leaders Forum or a very popular report from 2006 directed by Arnaud Langlois (financial analyst at JP Morgan, food, cosmetics and sustainable development division) – *Obesity: Re-shaping the Food Industry*<sup>11</sup>. Interestingly, the same actor wrote the preface of *Le désir de santé. Nouvelle aspiration des consommateurs, nouveau défi pour les entreprises*, a book that was written by the two Protéines co-founders (in 1989) where they prophesy a « landslide » that would be spurred by consumers' « desire for health »:

*« Le contenu de la marque doit évoluer pour intégrer ces nouveaux traits d'image, le marketing doit changer de sens pour tenir compte de cette évolution, la communication doit faire comprendre au consommateur tout l'effort que réalise l'entreprise pour le maintien et le développement de sa santé, la R&D devient centrale pour proposer des produits qui intègrent cette dimension, la supply chain doit évoluer pour sélectionner des matières premières répondant à ce désir de santé... Bref l'entreprise doit s'organiser durablement sur des bases différentes ». « Responsabilité sociale, développement durable et santé sont en train de devenir des clefs de la réussite, à condition que ces thèmes soient bien communiqués » (Thomassin, Gilibert, 2007, p. 1 and 3 for the quotes).*

Good communication? It is what Christina Drotz-Jonasson, from Nestlé (a.k.a the « Wellness Company » as promoted since 2003 by the CEO, Peter Brabeck) is mastering. The assistant vice-president Public Affairs at Nestlé since 1978 observed in two meetings of the EEN PPP committee :

*“Sometimes I believe we are too silent. Obviously, there is obesity, obviously what has been done so far is not enough. From a business perspective, a sick or a dead consumer is not a very good thing. We need a healthy consumer otherwise the business case is a lost case. Our long term goal is to support a healthy society”. (Field notes, réunion du comité PPP de l'EEN, 24/10/2008, Paris, agence Protéines)*

*“It is important not to be seen as bluewashing, greenwashing or whatever washing. But we don't want to be seen only as a money-making machine”. “When we are opening the purse, we must believe we can make a difference. Nestlé creates and shares values”. (Field notes, réunion du comité PPP de l'EEN, 28/04/2009, Services centraux de l'Université de Lille 2)*

The agenda setting of obesity, the worldwide promotions of PPPs for health, the transition of business strategies through CSR activities that are followed by financial markets when they are not legally compulsory (in France for the companies belonging to the CAC 40), can explain why industrial groups or their foundations are investing in

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<sup>10</sup> A case highly debated at the time was Derek Yach's hiring by PepsiCo where he supervised the group's global policy on health and agriculture. Typical of « revolving doors », this South African medical doctor who has been a Professor of Global Health at Yale University, was previously Gro Harlem Brundtland's head of cabinet and executive director for non-communicable disease and mental health at WHO. He has also been Senior consultant for UBS (investment bank), for the Vitality Institute (Discovery holding) on « behavioral insurance » and has headed global health at the Rockefeller Foundation. He is sitting on countless advisory boards (Clinton Global Initiative, NY Academy of Sciences, World Economic Forum...)

<sup>11</sup> A synthesis was presented in New York at UNEP Finance Initiative, a UN working group, in October 2005 : [http://www.unepfi.org/fileadmin/events/2005/roundtable/presentations/nyrt\\_langlois\\_2005.pdf](http://www.unepfi.org/fileadmin/events/2005/roundtable/presentations/nyrt_langlois_2005.pdf) (last accessed: 23 novembre 2016)

Epode-like programmes, so much so that the latter are partaking of the framing of causes that are relevant to the interests of the former<sup>12</sup>.

### ***Inverted philanthropic flows ? A programme adjusted to the food industry's influence strategies***

Whereas a European public policy targeting obesity (food supply, marketing and labelling in particular) is developing in the first decade of 2000 (Kurzer, Cooper 2013), Epode appears as an alternative that matches the concerns of the food industry. Fostering community-based interventions, at the local level, targeting children, through step by step « micro-changes » and « spill over » effects, Epode aims at modifying behaviours and « life routines » in the long run without frankly challenging « food modernity » or blaming individuals, behaviours and food. In the native language, “the methodological and informational tools designed by the project engineering” are meant to “enable families to modify at their pace their food habits and level of physical activity, without blaming them”, in line with Epode’s philosophy:

- « Non stigmatisation des personnes, des comportements et des aliments
- Prise en considération de la “modernité alimentaire”: praticité et faible investissement/temps/préparation
- Approche positive, progressive et concrète centrée sur le plaisir (de manger, de bouger)
- Renforcement du partage, du lien et de la cohésion sociale » (Guide du chef de projet [GCP], 2009 : chapitre 5).

Despite recent, yet marginal, evolutions, this philosophy fits the interests of the food industry – whose marketing techniques are being diverted<sup>13</sup>. Unsurprisingly, corporate sponsors are at ease with engagement charters that forbid any « direct » involvement of sponsors in the programme. Just like classical marketing, social

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<sup>12</sup> « Ferrero has always encouraged a healthy lifestyle, especially for young people, based on physical activity and a responsible consumption of its products. This commitment is, inter alia, demonstrated by:

- mainly targeting our commercial communications to parents, in order to support their crucial role in educating their children to a balanced diet and a healthy lifestyle;
- providing parents with products whose portion sizes allow them to ensure a balanced consumption by their children.

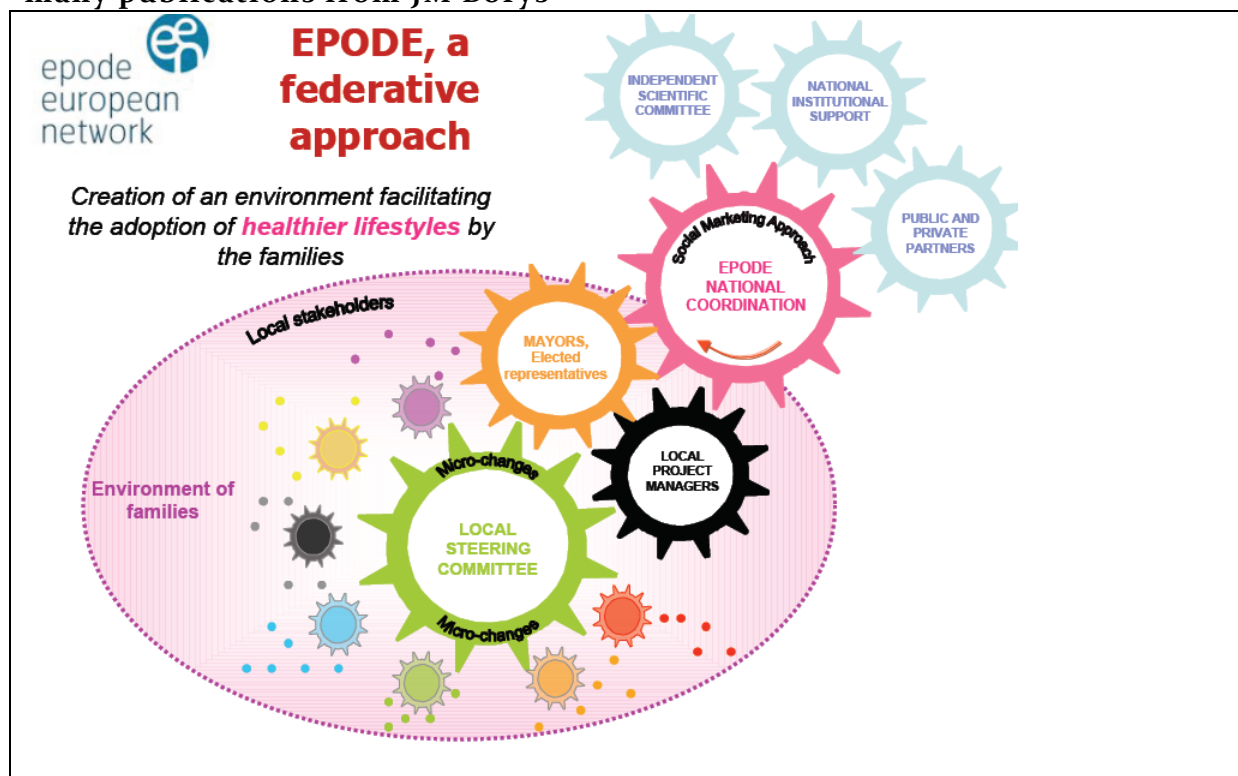
**Obesity is a complex and multi-factorial issue**, resulting from a combination of different causes, such as genetic predisposition, unbalanced diet, socio-economic factors and, **most of all, sedentary lifestyle**. In the context of the current obesity debate, **adequate attention should be drawn to the equation energy-in energy-out**. Industry has acknowledged the relevance of this factor and undertaken a series of actions, including programmes aimed at promoting physical activity and a healthy active lifestyle, especially amongst children. The food industry has a role to play, namely by supporting public education programmes endorsed by relevant institutions and governments” (“Ferrero’s statement”, in Jean-Michel Borys *et al.* (ed.), *Epode for the Promotion of Health Equity*, Paris, Lavoisier, 2015, p. 212, emphasis added).

<sup>13</sup> Industries target children since they are more vulnerable, are future adult consumers and because they have a prescription power within the family regarding purchase (the famous « pester power » used by fastfood chains such as MacDonald’s). Cf. MacDermott, T. O’Sullivan, Stead and Hastings, « International food advertising, pester power and its effects », *International Journal of Advertising*, vol. 25, 2006, p. 513-539 and Inpes, *L’impact du marketing sur les préférences alimentaires des enfants*, 15 septembre 2014, 50p. Epode’s targeting children partakes of the same strategy.



marketing acts on demand (and not on supply). Therefore, the deal is to educate consumers, to develop their individual responsibility, to turn them into entrepreneurs of their own future, by playing on their “desire” and “self esteem” with a very poor consideration for social inequalities or complexity of individual’s *raisons d’agir*. Epoque’s use of social marketing embodies the heavy trends of public health policies built upon the « entrepreneurial subject », which Deborah Lupton named technologies of « new prudentialism » (Lupton 2013 : 130-135). This “atomistic fiction” of informed consumers rests on a “market-based anthropological conception of the psychological dynamics that drives individual behaviour” (Bergeron *et al.* 2011 : 228). If references to principles of the *nudge theory* (Thaler, Sunstein 2008) were not explicit during my mission, some of my former colleagues – here the former EEN director – do not hesitate to refer to it in recent publications: « stimuler le changement de comportement grâce au changement d’environnement et à la mobilisation durable de l’ensemble des parties prenantes, pour mettre en œuvre des actions concrètes » (Raffin 2013 : 37).

**Frame 2. Slide presented at a EEN meeting (Paris, 2009), reproduced in many publications from JM Borys**



In short, if Epoque holds obesity as a multifactorial disease, the framing of the issue that the programme sustains insists on its individual and environmental characteristics, but with a very narrow vision of what « environment » is. What I remember from the numerous meetings and conferences I attended is the promotion

of the “walking bus”, walking to school, hospiscotch (« jouer, c’est déjà bouger »), balanced diet (« le poisson, il a tout bon ! », « la saison a le goût du fruit<sup>14</sup> ») and moderation (« Vive la gourmandise ») ; favouring physical activity and sleep rather than screens, but never any considerations for food supply outside of schools, nothing on organic foods, local farming, meat diet nor gender equality.

During a training for Epode project managers, Serge Michels’ presentation aims at giving « understanding elements to change behaviours (without constraint) ». Graduated from the Ecole nationale supérieure agronomique in Toulouse, he started his career in a German manufacturer of food aromas (Silesia), before joining a consumer group (UFC-Que Choisir) as food project manager from 1991 to 1996. He was hired in 1996 by Entropy Conseil, a consultancy specialised in corporate communication and crisis management and eventually joined in 2000 the Protéines Group as General Director. Nothing really qualifies him to reinforce the scientific basis of the programme based on social marketing and his presentation was indeed a fuzzy mix between references to social psychology, anecdotes, social clichés and good old common sense. No doubt “food behaviour is complex” as it is « an activity bounded by many implicit rules », many of which are « culture-based » and « taken for granted ». Yet, his discourse does not completely depart from preconceptions as it regularly refers to mechanistic and/or pavlovian expressions sketching an « all purpose and all terrain technique (psycho-sociology aiming at universality) (Villette 1984 : 46): « Resistance to change : individuals live in an equilibrium in terms of behaviours. Any force aiming at disturbing this equilibrium engenders an opposite force to maintain that equilibrium ». The consultant suggests referring to Kurt Lewin’s three-stage psycho-sociological theories of change: defreezing (sic.), change and refreezing. « One has to create the required conditions for change, for defreezing ». “To pass a new element in the food repertoire, *one has to convince the housewives* [**no feminist reaction in the audience!**], which will help family acceptance, remove obstacles to change, develop consumption stimuli ». The rest of the presentation is a melting pot between scientific borrowing (« cognitive redefinition », « information of disconfirmation ») and (somehow naive) common sense recipes - « work with opinion leaders », « when rappers will talk about obesity »...) - not free from social racism (cliché on cars and urban ghetto youth) (Field notes, Journées de formation des chefs de projet Epode, agence Protéines, Paris, 16-17/06/2009)

Of course, in terms of marketing, the excessive amount of messages is detrimental to the campaign. But the bottom line is that the framing of obesity and overweight is appropriate to the interests and discourses of the corporate sponsors (Sugarman, Sandman 2008), insofar as it helps preventing stringent regulations on food composition, labelling or taxes (« avoid blaming which generates stress ») thanks to the generalised promotion of “horizontal subsidiarity”. Beyond framing conflicts, the idea is not only to delay the decision-taking process but also to induce doubt and ignorance, by disseminating in the public space contradictory scientific data – a strategy coined as « agnotology » by Proctor (2011 ; see Déplaudé 2014 regarding the French salt industry). This is very openly explained, during an excellent lunch, by the

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<sup>14</sup> Explicit reference to Orangina Schweppes’ call for projects « Partageons le goût du fruit » that can receive applications from Epode members.

head of external communication of Orangina-Schweppes who – incidently – occupied the very same function within the Bacardi-Martini group for 18 years:

*« I think it is important (...) to become ambassadors of Epode in all our contacts with public authorities... in France at the EU level. For me, it gives sense and it gives visibility to Orangina-Schweppes. (...) I prefer that the people I liaise with understand there are other ways to deal with the issue than just the moralising approach, regulation, taxation. (...) I work for public safety and public health when I discuss with MPs, with mayors, with officials who did not know Epode before and realise that “Well, perhaps there is another way to solve the problem” ... And they are not dumber than us » (Interview, restaurant L’Ecume des Mers, Lille, 07/09/2009).*

In other words, the purpose goes well beyond the introduction of sugar and corporate power in schools, a line of argument developed in certain documentaries (such as « Gavés de sucre » broadcasted in *Cash Investigation* on France Télévisions in 2012). The challenge is to provide an alternative framing of the issue and a ready-made programme to local decision-makers looking for « miracle solutions » as well as continuing to shed doubts on policies that could be developed at the national, European and worldwide levels.

Invited by a lobbyist from Mars, I managed to attend a meeting of the EU Platform on *Diet, Physical Activity and Health* chaired by General Director, Robert Madelin, on the 9th of July 2009 at the Albert Borschette Conference Center, rue Froissart. I sat with representatives of what was at the time Cl2A (people from Mars, Nestlé, Kellog’s and Ferrero), next to the European Food Information Council (EUFIC). In front of me, I can see representatives of IBFAN (International Baby Food Action Network) who have a long lasting conflict with Nestlé, but also spokespersons from the European Heart Network, the European Health Alliance, the International obesity task force, the Bureau européen des unions de consommateurs, Eurocoop, medical federations, etc. Around us, there are also lobbyists for various industry federations (sport and leisure, video games, advertising and communication agencies...). The rationale behind this platform is to gather *stakeholders*, exchange best practices, and follow up of « commitments to progress ». Various presentations were on the agenda: the European Federation of the Associations of Dieticians, the Danish Council of Agriculture (COPA-COGECA), Nestlé and Mars (Central Europe Wellness Programme). Christina Drotz-Jonasson had to give a talk on « Healthy Lifestyle programmes within Nestlé (e.g. Epode) ». Her speech almost entirely focused on Epode. After having introduced Nestlé’s actions on nutrition, she developed her main argument: « education is a powerful tool to increase understanding and drive change », « multi-stakeholder approaches » in particular should be considered. The lobbyist presented a slideshow that was extremely familiar to me, first of all, the spill over framework reproduced in frame 2, to underline that Epode is a « federative and inclusive » approach, and that Nestlé has been supporting it since the onset, in 1992, that Nestlé decided to fund the EEN with Mars, Ferrero and DG Sanco and is partaking in various committees and in the board of the think tank (« bringing knowledge and experience »). The Swedish lobbyist underlined a crucial lesson: « the need for long-term action as change requires time to occur » but it works ! as underlined by the article on *Public Health Nutrition* (Romon et al. 2009) or Martin Katan’s editorial in the *New England Journal of Medicine* that claims it is “a remarkable operation”. The following slide underlined the BMI decrease in the 2 pilot towns of Fleurbaix and Laventie. She concluded that the industry’s involvement can be « sensitive » but « has to be transparent and framed by governing rules preventing conflicts of interest ». The first interaction that followed is an attempt to challenge the FLVS study asking for an independent counter-expertise. The spokesperson for IBFAN: “I understand why Nestlé is involved. You push yourselves as a nutrition company, but when I go to other meetings, you’re only pushing for chocolate! Even if

Epode is a good thing, to me it is very worrying that a company with such a marketing orientation... [intervention from the European Heart Network: *it's a corporate PR strategy!*]. Nestlé's answer is well crafted: "CSR projects as projects do not exist in Nestlé because CSR projects have to be part of our overall work. We create values for society in whatever we do and at the same time creating value for the company. Of course there is a business case for what you are doing. But there should not be a contradiction between the two". The debate is very heated (on the promoted messages, the independence of the editorialist in the *New England Journal of Medicine*...). Nestlé's lobbyist managed to dodge criticisms quite well but she also benefited from the continuing supports of the DG for Health who reminded that public affairs department were not involved in the project management then asked for a more measured look at events: « this is not a bar room conversation. But if you want to discuss Epode, go back to previous discussions (...) What's important to understand is that Nestlé is funding Epode, not doing it". After an ultimate try by IBFAN – "Are we saying in this platform it is ok for a corporation to be involved in [health promotion programme] – a really tricky things to say, this has not bad hindsight?" – the controversy is ended with authority by Robert Madelin: "you are going beyond the question. The question is: are there tools that work? This is the issue of the platform governance. In anyway, the ministers would say go away [...] this is subsidiarity..." (Field notes, réunion de la plateforme européenne, Bruxelles, 09/07/2009).

I have shown elsewhere that Epode's sponsoring is partaking of a strategy of influence from the food industries, the "pro-active neutralisation" through a form of "cross-pollinisation"<sup>15</sup> and/or a "paradoxical externalisation" where the FLVS association, committed local authorities (and, in part, DG Sanco) come to defend economic interests (Alam 2015). On the one hand, Epode takes the shape of an "inverted" externalisation where private actors are coordinating actions from public actors (Bergeron *et al.* 2011 : 206) : it is corporate and non-governmental actors that prescribe their solutions and their rules of the game and coordinate the network of member local authorities whose actions – supported by taxpayers' money – are at the root of Epode's "performances" and of the building up of the "trademark" success. On the other hand, and for a relatively modest contribution<sup>16</sup>, these actions are being valorised by corporate sponsors in their institutional communication. To put it differently, the "symbolic dividend" of local authorities' actions – at the basis of Epode's branding – are mostly benefiting to corporate actors from the food industry, (Fondation Nestlé Entreprise, Orangina Schweppes, Ferrero and Kellogg's in France) today the sole sponsors of a *win-win* programme where certain partners win more than others. All in all, if PPPs and *nudging* go hand in hand to sideline the State (Benje 2015), this does not mean a flashback to the pre-history of the Social State (Lefèvre, Duvoux 2016 : 94) insofar as the analysis highlights inverted philanthropic flows.

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<sup>15</sup> The term was coined by William Novelli, co-founder of Porter/Novelli, a New York based PR firm (Stauber and Rampton 2012 : 226).

<sup>16</sup> At the highest, sponsors spend 250 000 euros a year (figures for EEN sponsors or Epode « gold partners »), which is open to tax exemptions.

## EPODE, AN ENTREPRENEUR OF PHILANTHROPIC MOBILISATIONS OR THE SUCCESSFUL MARKETING OF SOCIAL MARKETING

The work of dissimulation and/or neutralisation of different variations of the « hidden transcript » (Scott 1990), at the root of consent to the programme, is mostly the remit of the agency's consultants. I will highlight the distinctive social properties of these professionals in PR and brokerage between the differing intersected social worlds of this philanthropic network (local collectivities and communities, organised « civil societies », corporations and industry federations, national and European decision-makers, and *high flying scholars*). As such, a considerable part of these missionaries' activities rests in the circulation of a "reformatory common sense" (Topalov 1999 : 44) relying on the branding of Epode as a « game changer ». The repertoire of expertise, thank to the enrolment of academics guaranteeing disinterestment and cognitive authority of science goes hand in hand with the register of universality (internationalisation) in order to technicise, depoliticise and activate beliefs in *Community Based Interventions* as the indisputable *one best way* of the policy field.

### ***Protéines agency : a discrete broker***

In 1989, Christophe Thomassin and Jean-Michel Gilibert, at the time at Lesieur's marketing department, seized an economical niche - la « communication santé-grand public ». As they explained to the specialised press, « there were then only mainstream agencies that knew nothing about health or health agencies that had no mainstream culture<sup>17</sup> ». The succession of food scares in the 1990s and the agenda setting of obesity as a worldwide epidemics confirmed their intuition as they developed services in corporate communication, crisis management, press relations, e-strategy and e-reputation (creation of Protéines Digitale) targeting food and health issues. This Parisian small business company classically operated through merging (in 2002 with JM Borys' Nutrika and Sandrine Raffin's Nutrylis) to expand. In 2008, Protéines was employing 75 collaborators (100 in 2009), owned an office in Belgium and in Canada and its gross profit kept on rising: 10 millions € in 2007, 11,5 millions € in 2009<sup>18</sup>. In 2010, 70% of its clients belong to the food (MacDonald's, Ferrero, Kellog's, Coca-Cola, Nestlé, Danone, Kraft Food, Bel, Sodebo and industry federations such as ANIA, International Sweeteners Association, INAPORC, l'AFIDEM - Association des fruits et légumes transformés...) and retail industries (Carrefour, Leclerc, Casino). The rest of the portfolio is composed of clients from the pharmaceutical and insurance industries (AXA Santé), of less sectoral companies (Crédit Agricole, Peugeot, SNCF, The Walt

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<sup>17</sup> Delphine Masson, « Protéines a la santé », *Stratégies*, 19/11/2009.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem* and « Siparex injecte des vitamines chez l'agence Protéines », *Capital Finance*, 23/06/2008. From 2014, the dynamics are shifting since Protéines declared a gross margin of 7 millions €, then merged in 2016 with another agency. « Protéines clarifie son offre », *Stratégies*, 10/07/2014. « L'agence Equinoa annonce l'acquisition du groupe Protéines », *La correspondance de la Publicité*, 15/03/2016.

Disney Company) but also public administrations (Protéines has been collaborating with the Ministry of Agriculture on the Programme national d'alimentation with the Institut national pour la prévention et l'éducation à la santé) and NGOs (France Parkinson, Ligue contre le cancer, dessine-moi un mouton and, of course, FLVS association whose budget amounts to one million euros).

Benefiting from this strong network of relationships built up over 15 years, the agency took on the role of broker at the interface between the public and private sectors be it corporate or not-for-profit. During 7 years, Epode coordinating team (in France and at the international level) is composed of Protéines consultants whose essential activity, from 2011 onwards, was the promotion of Epode's brand and international network, since the loss of the contract in France (see Alam's conclusion, 2016 and frame 3). Although the agency is meant to be only a service provider, the borders between her and the associative structures remain fuzzy since the Epode International Network is driven by the former Epode's managers. The deal has not changed drastically since the previous period as Epode had commercially captured the project with the initial marginalisation of the FLVS association. Even if the association is instrumental for credibility and tax reasons, it is really the agency consultants who interact with partners.

Therefore, Protéines has been a genuine entrepreneur of philanthropic mobilisation. Thank to the accumulated social capital and the acute knowledge of the industrial field and of the health and food public administrations, the agency consultants have been able to develop the programme, from fundraising targeting their historical clients to the use of this network for propaganda purposes. These networks of relationships are reinforced by the "social surface" (multipositionnality, i.e. the propensity to occupy and hold several – dominant – social positions per person, see Boltanski 1973) of the pilgrim father, Jean-Michel Borys (Epode and EEN director, EIN General Secretary), co-founder of the FLVS study, author of countless publications on Epode (see below). His "scientific capital of external reputation" (Bourdieu, 1984, 128-132) has also been acknowledged in the field of official expertise (member of an ANAES working group on childhood obesity, of an AFSSA working group on glucides<sup>19</sup>). It is also JM Borys' accumulated relational capital that partly helps to understand Nestlé's involvement in Epode, by focusing for example on the professional and friendly relationships he has with Patrick Serog, nutritionist, medical consultant for Lesieur and Nestlé since 1980, and actual board member of the Nestlé France Foundation<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>19</sup> At the same time, in 2004, he registered at the Science Po Paris' *Executive Master on Public Health* chaired by the champion of "sécurité sanitaire" and former head of cabinet of Bernard Kouchner at the Ministry of Health, Didier Tabuteau (Alam 2010).

<sup>20</sup> In 1998, Borys et Serog published *Les kilos des Ados* (Editions du Nil).

The social properties of Protéines' associate director (Développement Santé) (1998-2011), today vice-president, are atypical compared to other consultants involved in Epode's coordination. In 2010, Epode was co-directed by Sandrine Raffin, post-graduate in marketing and cultural institutions management, who began her career in the cultural field (Ministry of Culture, manager of a dance company) then held senior positions in a network of franchised retailers specialised on tableware (franchise system she would have imported in Epode) before setting up her own social marketing agency (Nutrylis merged in 2002 with Protéines). Highly involved in the drafting of the *Epode European Network*, she is dismissed in 2010 and substituted by Pauline Harper, an English-speaking Canadian lawyer, graduated in French literature, business and law, and former employee of well-known communication agencies (BBDO, Saatchi & Saatchi and Publicis in France). Next to these two leaders, Christophe Roy, holder of an MA in International Affairs, deputy director for Epode France was in charge of international development, probably tank to his cosmopolitan dispositions (childhood in Africa, project management in Latin America and Africa, experience at WHO), international social capital and expertise in health programme management (3 years at WHO as project manager for the Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health; project manager at INSERM's International Affairs department). Following his dismissal, he is substituted by a young consultant, Yann Le Bodo, bilingual in French and Spanish, engineer in food innovation (Ecole Supérieure d'Agriculture d'Angers), holder of an MA in social sciences applied to food behaviours (created at Toulouse 2 by Pr J. -P. Poulain<sup>21</sup>), and former project manager on health education (CRES Picardie)<sup>22</sup>. The rest of the team – characterised by an intense turn over – was composed of several junior consultants and trainees, often bilingual in English, holding Masters in communication, social sciences applied to human nutrition or political science.

Since then, the team in charge of Epode International Network has been strengthened by three new draftees– Julie Mayer, Hugues Ruault du Plessis et Hannah Finch – whose properties and resources confirm the trends initiated with the EEN (expertise in communication/health and food ; cosmopolitan dispositions and ability to follow EU projects). The first one holds a MA in scientific communication (UPMC, Paris VI) and in social sciences applied to food (Toulouse 2). She joined Protéines in 2006 as « strategic planner » (prospective analysis of food and health habits) and built up her own consultancy in scientific communication (APPETITE). Since 2013, she has been driving the Open project (*Obesity prevention by European Networks*) ending in January 2017. With over 1 million euros subsidies from the EU Consumers, Health, Agriculture and Food Executive Agency, the project aims at studying the implementation of Epode vis-à-vis teenagers inhabiting *deprived communities*. The second draftee, holder of the MA Nutrition, Qualité, Santé from UPMC in 2010 joined the EIN team after a first experience as administrative assistant at the *European Public Health Alliance*, Brussels-based paneuropean NGO created in 1993 and funded by the EU. Thank to this initial experience, this « knowledge broker » – as he introduces himself on *LinkedIn* – was the right man for the job, since he headed from

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<sup>21</sup> Sociologist, head of ISTHIA (Institut Supérieur du Tourisme, de l'Hôtellerie et de l'Alimentation), Pr Poulain steers the expert committee of la Fondation Nestlé France. Incidentally, this foundation supported one of his latest books (*Dictionnaire des Cultures Alimentaires*, PUF, 2012) in which Serge Michels, Protéines General Director signed the articles entitled « associations de consommateurs » and « dispositifs de veille ».

<sup>22</sup> Y. Le Bodo has started a PhD on obesity prevention (Université de Laval, Québec). His position was taken upon by a young Italo-german belonging to the internalised elite. Her mother was Professor in Fine Arts in Roma and her father was manager in the food industry in Austria and in London. Graduted from La Sapienza, she holds a MA in clinical psychology, lived for some time in Buenos Aires and switch very easily between French, English, Spanish, Italian and German (Field notes, congrès Thao, Ibiza, 20-22/10/2010).

2012 to 2015 the *Epode for the Promotion of Health Equity* project (PPP funded by the Commission and Nestlé – 1,8 million euros over 3 years – to analyse “the added value of the implementation of an adapted EPODE methodology in the reduction of socioeconomic inequalities in health-related diet and physical activity behaviours of families with children aged 6 to 12, living in 7 different European communities”)<sup>23</sup>. The third consultant is British and holds a BA from Durham University (Modern Languages, French & Spanish). After an experience as instructor in English at Air France, she post-graduated at Sciences Po Paris (MA in International Relations – International Security). She joined the team in 2013 as head of project for the EIN following several traineeships at the ministry of Health and at l’Agence d’Aide à la Coopération Technique et au Développement (where she partook in crisis management and prevention campaigns).

Finally, as broker between local authorities and corporate sponsors, Protéines consultants are the sole interlocutors of public partners who interact, on very rare occasions (symposia) with the food industry. Using a sport metaphora, consultants literally set a « screen », i. e. they allow industry lobbyists to realise secretly their work of influence, insofar as they divert attention from the « hidden text » of health PPPs.

Two examples can illustrate that idea. When I presented my first state of the art in front of the EEN Board, including the EU Commission General Director for Health, my talk was a very academic one, and methodologically sceptical vis-à-vis PPPs for health, not at all what was expected (see below and Alam 2011), the call for order did not come from lobbyists who remained silent, but from the head of the agency who accused me of being “too ideological”. More broadly, in the training sessions for Epode project managers, as well as in press interviews, a compulsory step for Epode coordinators is to justify PPPs for health and the crucial need for dialogue between industry and public health (not only for budgetary reasons), and to downsize conflicts of interest (« *perceived* conflicts of interest ») by resorting to chiseled sound bites (CSR, engagement charter for partners, no intervention in the management...). In one training session for new-coming local authorities, the two directors mentioned right from the start the PPP issue (because I was attending? To sweep it easily under the rug afterwards ?) which is « *a choice that was made very early on, in 1992, which is debatable, sure, but which is very useful for issues that go beyond budgetary considerations. You will realise it concretely. And you won’t have mickeys on documents, in schools... it is extremely bounded and regulated* ». Following the presentation of the agency’s portfolio, including the Fondation Ronald MacDonald, a question from a project manager from Lille city council addressed the ethical dimension of the programme. The two directors are eager and very well prepared to reply and defuse the situation:

- Sandrine Raffin: « *Seriously, is it really the problem ? (...) As director of the agency... I am in harmony with myself because I have a professional ethics when I work with MacDo or Bayer. What drives me is the recommendations of the scientific committee (experts like Monique Romon who you know well in Lille...), but it is also the PNNS ones [Programme National Nutrition Santé] with which we are complementary ... (...) What we did is to understand obesity factors ? Again, it is not me talking here but our experts. We can’t just stick to our personal convictions. (...) There are two options really : on the one hand, better understand the determinants, the families’ environment, and so on... (...) On the other hand, why not involving food companies in the process and help them improve ? (...) MacDo lately released a*

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<sup>23</sup> See JM Borys *et al.*, *Epode for the Promotion of Health Equity*, Paris, Lavoisier, 2015. Since 2016, this consultant joined the Generali Vitality France’s developing team (behavioural insurance).



sandwich with wholemeal bread, offers fruits, changed its frying oil (all this following our advice). Luckily, it is pretty good for business – if not, we would go bankrupt ! [...]

- JM Borys: Talking about ethics, just like you, I was not very at ease when I was invited lately by the minister of Trade, along with the CEO of MacDo France to talk about Epode. And the CEO asked me “Doctor, do you know how many meals we deliver everyday?” 1 million ! 1 million ! All my doubts disappeared. An epsilon change over one million, it is colossal !
- S. Raffin: And it is the very *raison d’être* of the PNNS 2 charter developed by Serge Hercberg [« PNNS father »] and the Department of Health’s teams. Charters were signed with Coca Cola, Orangina, etc. Not to say « bravo » but to encourage commitment to change. (...) We create incentives for companies to enter in a virtuous circle (...). It is Ferrero’s strategy as well: that patients (sic.) buy little by little all lifelong. In Mexico, over 60% of children are obese and suffer from type 2 diabetes. If this trend carries on, it will soon be impossible for them to sell their products. Companies come to realise their business model rests on healthy consumers. Today, Epode partners belong to the retail and food industry (like Nestlé), but these partners do not interfere in the programme, in its content (whatever the theme at stake). (Field notes, Journées de formation des chefs de projet Epode, agence Protéines, Paris, 16-17/06/2009)

Just like Hélène Michel (2005) suggested regarding the *EU Public Affairs* training sessions she observed, this pedagogical training goes way beyond the boundaries of obesity prevention techniques insofar as the « implicit pedagogy » is to defend and promote the programme and the achievements of communications professionals. In addition, training sessions, symposia, annual congresses, *books of recommendations*, press releases and interviews in the general press or specialised one or promotional videos, are as many tools to depoliticise a programme that targets a very symbolic population (« *c’est sacré l’enfant* !<sup>24</sup> ») and presents PPPs as technical, pragmatic and efficient solutions. As brokers between the different partners, these *spin doctors* divert *blaming* accusations addressed to the industry and tend to neutralise them. Having said that, the efficacy of such rhetorical dispositives would remain very weak if the programme’s promoter did not succeed in gathering external institutional and scientific supports (see Alam 2011) that operate as “quality labels” (Bergeron *et al.*, 2009), and in investing to a large extent in the production of expert knowledge designed to detail the programme’s success factors. Epode European Network, presented as a think and do tank, was a key step.

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<sup>24</sup> « Focusing on children is a sensitive point because everybody has children or grandchildren or is looking forward to having children, and so... children are holy. This target disconnects from the world of business, of competition, and so it gave... I think this very positive image which has long been embodied – and it is still the case – Epode relied a lot on this, on children’s purity... Obviously, with children, we can’t do harm, we are not allowed to do... commercial things... » (Interview with JM Borys, Paris, 23 February 2009)

### ***Success « monstration » through the repertoire of expertise and the register of internationalisation***

Epode's success can be apprehended as a speculative bubble whose algorithm can be summed up this way : *scientific publications + implementation of the programme in different European countries → EU subsidies → scientific publications more openly action-oriented/ symposium + development of international networks (EEN) → new EU subsidies → expert publications, symposium + enlarging of the international network (EIN)*

Of course, such a presentation appears teleological with very little consideration for « minor glitches » (I was surely one of them) and « aborted historical outcomes ». This having been said, a given of policy analysis is that consensus around a solution is enough to demonstrate its relevance (Lindblom 1959 : 84) and that “legitimacy does not come from efficacy but from presumption of efficacy” (Lagroye 1984 : 463). Therefore one has to acknowledge that Epode's success above all rests on an efficient marketing campaign in which the repertoire of expertise and the register of internationalisation go hand in hand, insofar as the former is instrumental in the government of the EU (Robert 2003).

A careful analysis of Dr JM Borys' publications provides a first set of evidence over the building up of an international consensus regarding Community-Based Interventions. Beyond books on obesity published in French, JM Borys (co-)signed 57 articles referenced on PubMed and/or on data base of the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Santé Publique between 1993 and 2016<sup>25</sup>. 8 articles were published before 2000 (half of which as main author – i. e.: first or last on the list of authors). Those are essentially scientific publications analysing FLVS study's epidemiological data over 10 years. Those publications are signed by the main leaders of the FLVS study group. After 2000, the rhythm of publications is increasing : JM Borys had entered the capital of Protéines, different programmes displaying the Epode brand have been developed, significant historical perspective allows for conclusions on the FLVS study. 22 articles are published from 2001 to 2009. All in all, on the 1993-2009 corpus (n=30 articles), JMB appears 11 times as main contributor. On these eleven articles, 5 of them are defending Epode methodology's efficacy: 4 are in French (in 2000, in *Revue médicale de la Suisse Romande* and in 2005 in *Diététique et nutrition, Concours Médical et Diabétologie, nutrition et facteurs de risque*) and one in English in *Public Health Nutrition*. This last article, which is also the only one signed in English as main author by JMB (last of the

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<sup>25</sup> On the 23rd November 2016, I did a first research for 'Jean-Michel Borys' on *google scholar* which I completed with the references mentioned on his website (*jeanmichelborys.com*) and on his linkedIN profile. In the database, since I did not manage to read or even find them, I did not include the references in French that were mentioned on his site : *Médecine et nutrition* (1995), *Revue de nutrition pratique* (1998), *Revue Française d'Endocrinologie Clinique* (1998), *Diabétologie et Facteurs de Risque* (2000), *Médecine et nutrition* (2001), *Médecine au Féminin* (2001).

list) is Epode's flagship publication<sup>26</sup>. This publication is celebrated in February 2009 in the *New England Journal of Medicine* by Martijn Katan, emeritus Professor of nutrition at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (see also Kraak & Story 2010 in the *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*) and these two papers are very largely spread and commented by the Epode European Network<sup>27</sup>. In 2010, the two EEN directors are consecrated as they both sign an article in *Preventing Childhood Obesity. Evidence Policy and Practice*, published in the BMJ [British Medical Journal] Books collection of Wiley-Balckwell, along with Pr Philip James and Tim Lobstein (president and director of the International Association for the Study of Obesity), well known whistleblowers since the 1980s for their hostility towards the food industry<sup>28</sup>.

**Table 1. Dr J.-M Borys' Publications in journals with editorial board**

Jean Michel Borys signed 57 articles	From 1993 to 2009 30	From 2010 to 2016 27
44 in English 12 in French 1 in Flemish	23 in English 7 in French  <i>Journals specialised on obesity</i> <b>7 in International Journal of Obesity</b> (publication from the International Association for the Study of Obesity); 1 in Obesity 1 in International Journal for Eating Disorder  <i>Biomedical/ nutrition Journals</i> 2 in Metabolism 2 in Diabetes & Metabolism 2 in European Journal of Nutrition 1 in US Journal of Clinical Nutrition 1 in Biomedicine & Pharmacotherapy  <i>Public health/ nutrition journals</i> 1 in European Journal of Epidemiology 1 in Journal of Public Health 1 in Public health nutrition	21 in English 5 in French 1 in Flemish  <i>Journals specialised on obesity</i> 2 in Obesity reviews 1 in International Journal of Obesity 1 in Obesity Facts 1 in Pediatric Obesity  <i>Biomedical/ nutrition Journals</i> 2 in Annals of Nutrition & Metabolism 2 in Canadian Journal of Diabetes 2 in Antioxidants & Redox Signaling 1 in US Endocrinology 1 in Early Human Development  <i>Public health/ nutrition / sport journals</i> <b>3 in BMC Public Health</b> 1 in European Journal of Public Health 1 in Public health nutrition 1 in PLoS ONE 1 in International Journal for Equity in Health 1 in Journal of Science & Medicine in Sport 1 in Science & Sport
25 as main contributor	11	14
<b>Between 24 and 26 Pro Epode</b> <i>explicitly defend Epode's methodology and/ or its global and sectoral efficacy</i>	<b>5 Pro Epode</b>  2 set the FLVS study structuring hypotheses without drawing conclusions	<b>19 Pro Epode</b>

<sup>26</sup> 2009 is used as a turning point for the table summing up the data base.

<sup>27</sup> During the meeting of the EEN work package « political involvement », on the 3rd March 2009, every participant found at its place a copy of both articles. Organised in the posh Salons Etoile Wagram, avenue de Wagram, the presentation of the work package's progress was taking place in front of important guests : apart from academics (including Henri Bergeron from the CSO), representatives of the European Commission, corporate sponsors, and European elected representatives, including the former conservative mayor of Royan, Philippe Most, president of the Club des maires and of the European Alliance for Epode, who gave a talk on the implementation of the programme in his city. Field notes, 03/03/2009.

<sup>28</sup> A. Simmons, J. -M. Borys, B. Swinburn, « Community interventions – planning for sustainability » and N. Henley and S. Raffin, “Social marketing to prevent childhood obesity”. The book directed by Elizabeth Waters, Jacob Seidell, Boyd Swinburn and Ricardo Uauy is highly exhibited at the EEN Symposium of April 2011 in Brussels.

In less than 6 years (2010-2016), JM Borys published as many articles as in the previous period (n=27), and he did so in English and as main contributor. These articles are openly promoting the programme and aim at describing/modelling its « success<sup>29</sup> ». As such, it is precisely at this time that names from the agency consultants appear on the list of authors (C. Roy, S. Raffin, Y. Le Bodo, L. Walter, P. Harper, H. Ruault du Plessis, J. Mayer, H. Finch and even Pierre Richard, from 2013<sup>30</sup>). None of them are doctors nor PhD students.

But does it really matter for an epistemology that is action-oriented rather than knowledge-oriented ? Thank to the heuristic virtues of ethnopraxis (Wacquant 2004), being myself an insider in the EEN, I have experienced in practice what it meant to be an expert in public policy and how different it was from being a social scientist (Alam 2011 ou 2016). According to me, only observing participation is able to reveal to what extent the academic role differs from the expert role (hierarchical authority, evaluation by contractors and not peer review, lack of independence in the research, urgency of results, production of “indisputability” and ... ordinary dependency). The recommendations I formulated rested more on the “monstration” of their scientific relevance (Alam, Godard 2007) than on the relevance of their scientific demonstration. In such a PPP, the mertonian ideal of science (research autonomy) is torn between expectations of sponsors (production of guidelines, production of an ethical charter...) and the heteronomy of research questions: what is a successful PPP? What are the critical points? What are the key success factors? How to prevent conflict of interest? And many other extra-scientific questions elaborated by the EEN Board and not by the researcher... Like mainstream managerial science, these questions are designed to increase the efficacy or at least the legitimacy of the PPP. They embody a vision of the programme as “a given, an entity that has a ‘normal’ functioning whose objective is to ensure its reproduction” (de Gaulejac 2009 : 73).

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<sup>29</sup> From the titles (« The EPODE Canadian Obesity Forum: Game Changer » or « The Potential for Reducing the Prevalence of Overweight and Obese Children in Canada Using the EPODE Methodology » in the *Canadian Journal of Diabetes* or « EPODE - A Model for Reducing the Incidence of Obesity and Weight-related Comorbidities » in *US Endocrinology*) to the content : « La mobilisation des communautés issue de la méthodologie EPODE permet d'avoir un impact rapide et durable sur les enfants et leur famille » (Correspondances en MHDN) or « Conclusions: Our findings show that, after EPODE interventions, the low socioeconomic groups improved their behavior compared to the other socio-economic groups. This indicates that the EPODE methodology has the capacity not only to reduce obesity prevalence but also to decrease health inequities » (*Annals of Nutrition & Metabolism*). This last article, published in 2016, which insists on Epode's « double effect » (obesity/social inequalities) is in line with the EPHE and OPEN projects, funded by the European Commission's Health Programme.

<sup>30</sup> This former business director, then Protéines' associate director, was in charge of the strategic development of the Epode European network and of the relations with the media and private partners of the project (I never met him in any EEN work meeting, but once in a Viasano Symposium in Belgium).

## PPP, Socio-history and ideology: a scepticism seen as heretic. Field notes, 5-7 May 2009.

Less than four months after my arrival in the think tank, I had to present my first recommendations to the EEN Board in Amsterdam. Relatively unaware of the sponsors' expectations, I presented a first slide about the epistemological dilemma for an expert-sociologist: "How to deal with normative issues in a sociological research?". I then presented the theoretical foundations of PPPs which are said to be based from the onset on trust and are seen as technical, politically neutral and "win win" operations. As such, I emphasised that PPPs were not an innovation of the managerial modernity but had a long history intimately linked to the socio-genesis of the State (Hood 1998 : 201-206, Wettenhall 2003 : 91). Regarding the fashion of PPPs, I nonetheless underlined that we were witnessing a "commodification" of ethics which had become a "supply" from the corporate sector (Salmon, 2004). First recalling the need to think beyond the theory of "hostile worlds", I then listed the benefits expected by corporate sponsors ("a discrete lobbying", "a subtle PR strategy", "material benefits" such as tax refunds) as I believed it was important to identify what could be the rewards before regulating PPPs. Finally, I wondered what kind of recommendations I was meant to produce: what is the priority in terms of "risk analysis"? Would the drafting of strict partnership rules jeopardise the (financial) participation of corporate partners?

The more board members casted reproachful looks at me as the presentation went on, the more isolated and disadjusted I felt. But I could not imagine to what extent this methodological scepticism would isolate me after a very tough discussion. The head of the EEN urged me to drop what she saw as an ideological stance and to focus instead on local partnerships (which are probably less sulphurous). Among various reactions, the general director of the EU Commission's Health and Consumer Protection DG advocated a change of vocabulary was needed. He suggested favouring "voluntary cooperation" over PPP as it is less symbolically loaded and advised me to define concrete parameters: *"Talk about evaluation and accountability. Set explicit public good goals from the beginning, then develop monitoring and evaluation"*. This interaction is enough to depict how sociological work is regarded with contempt and to what extent academism is seen as irrelevant compared to managerial evaluation. As a strong reminder, the head of the EEN confessed her concern two days later in a violent email "about the progress of [my] work but also about [my] focus and [my] positioning which do not match our reciprocal engagements and expectations". She added that "the general framework of the grant agreement is non-negotiable" and that "our objective is not to question the relevance of PPPs (...) but to find innovative solutions in order to regulate in an efficient and flexible manner the relations between the different stakeholders". She explicitly concluded that "if EPODE's philosophy was not in line with [me] (...), the terms and conditions of our collaboration could be reconsidered". Exit, voice, loyalty? I found it hard to be the dissenting voice among a won over audience, experiencing "the fear of being against", "the anxiety of exclusion and ex-communication" (Bourdieu, 1981, 24). Surely, it is a basic rule of interactionism that "whatever social role the individual plays during a conversational encounter, he will in addition have to fill the role of interactant". (Goffman, 1982a : 116). To put it differently, a form of social control operates within certain encounters, notably in collective meetings where, whatever role (academic or expert) we endorse, we cannot break the rule of etiquette or systematically argue and contradict our colleagues. Maintaining good relations with the co-workers we study is not only a methodological precaution, it is above all related to face-work (Goffman, 1982b : 30). Especially when one has to pay the rent! As such, I carried on my activities, dropped any comments regarding the relevance of PPPs, stucked to pragmatic criticisms but refused to appear in promotional videos or sign so-called "scientific" articles that appeared to me as "pro domo" accounts.

If he wants to turn into an expert, the social scientist “has to exchange Weber’s epistemology of social sciences, characterised by a comprehensive stance, for an ‘expert’ epistemology that is rationalist, positivist and radically action-oriented. In a world he knows to be uncertain, conflictual and non-popperian, he has to arbitrate, decide what the norm is (in terms of ethics or public interest), manufacture the “universal” and the “indisputable” truth, and ‘negotiate with the tension between scientific reservation and expressive will, neutrality and value, specialty and generality, description and prescription, facts and laws’ (Memmi 1996: 75), that is to say to wear the too-big-for-him clothes of the moralist” (Alam 2011: 245). The job creates even more role conflicts that the EEN is an advocacy tank whose main activities, like any firm, has to do with marketing (Abelson 2009: 77). Far from being a “university without students” (Weaver 1989: 54), a place where independent, original and disinterested thinking is produced, the EEN and its subsequent avatars were clearly oriented towards the repetition and amplification of this simple message “Epode is a success”.

As such, in the follow up of the EEN, the publications of those who can be named as consulting-engineers are « an act of public relations partaking of a business strategy » (Villette 1984 : 45). But, they are also an evidence of the programme’s internationalisation as foreign academics also started appearing in the list of authors.

Without being comprehensive, to Monique Romon (member of the FLVS study group, chairman of the FLVS association, deputy general secretary of the Société Française de Nutrition and expert in various working groups) were added – with *Epode European Network* – Jan Vinck (Professor of psychology, Hasselt University, Belgium), Luis Moreno (Professor of public health, Zaragoza University, ), Stefan de Heenauw (Professor of public health, Ghent University, member of the scientific committee of the Belgian Food Authority and of the Health National Council), Jacob Seidell (Professor of public health and nutrition, at the Free University of Amsterdam), but also Carolyn Summerbell (Professeur in human nutrition, Durham University), Susan Jebb (Professor of Diet & Population Health, Oxford University), Boyd Swinburn (Professor of Population Nutrition and Global Health, University of Auckland), Simone Pettigrew (Professor in consumer research, Curtin University, and member of the *BMC Public Health*’s editorial committee), or Terry Huang (Professor of public health and head of the Center for Systems and Community Design, City University of New York), Emile Lévy (Professor of medicine, Université de Montreal) and Svetoslav Handjiev (Professor in nutrition, Sofia University, president of the Bulgarian association for the study of obesity and of the Bulgarian Society for Healthy and Foods). Among the list of signatures, one can find the promoters of « Epode-like » programmes in Romania, Bulgaria, Netherlands, Belgium, Canada, Portugal, some of which are sometimes advisers to government. It was the case of Dr Armando Barriguete, EIN president, adviser to the Mexican government or of Pedro Graça, associate professor at the University of Porto, head of the Portuguese national programme for the promotion of healthy food (ministry of Health), representing the Portuguese government at the High Level Group on Nutrition and Physical Activity and today president of the European Action Network for Reducing Marketing Pressure on Children (WHO Europe)...

Within this pool of academic researchers and consultants, the main members of the EEN and EIN Boards of director and of its expert committee can be found. As I underlined elsewhere regarding the EEN, these experts are mostly there for public relations and brokerage with health institutions. A long analysis would easily demonstrate to what extent they are multipositioned brokers who significantly built their career towards the accumulation of their “scientific capital of external reputation”, rather than the management of their “academic capital” (Bourdieu 1984 : 128-132). Just like the Professor of nutrition I worked with on PPPs in Lille – who is involved in civil society (president of the FLVS association, president of a local network of medical care for obese patients - OSEAN), in the academic field (chef du service de nutrition du Centre Hospitalier Universitaire de Lille, secrétaire général adjoint de la Société Française de Nutrition) and in various expert committees (Ministry of Health, INPES, EPODE...), the scholars supporting Epoque take advantage of their social ubiquity due to internationalised resources that are partly heteronomous to the scientific field. A good example is the Dutch Professor of Health and nutrition, who was in charge of the EEN WP on evaluation, and signed a vast amount of articles promoting the programme. Jacob Seidell who notably directed the earlier mentioned book *Preventing Childhood Obesity. Evidence Policy and Practice*, is head of the *Institute for Health Sciences* in Amsterdam, belongs to various editorial boards (*European Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, *Public Health Nutrition*, *Obesity Facts* and *Obesity Journal*) and has chaired numerous academic societies (*European Association for the Study of Obesity*, *Netherlands Academy of Nutritional Sciences*, *Federation of European Nutrition Societies*). But he has also been policy adviser for numerous international health institutions (*Netherlands Health Council*, *WHO*, *International Obesity Task Force*, *US National Childhood Obesity Foundation*).

All in all, the collective social surface of this group of experts would reveal all the fora that count regarding obesity, from WHO to the European Commission, up to the main scientific journals where “pro Epoque” articles were published, as well as numerous academic societies and management of public or not-for-profit obesity prevention programmes. In addition, as they hold prestigious academic titles, these individuals guarantee by their sole presence the scientific quality of the works undertaken within this policy network as well as its pretended universality and disinterestment<sup>31</sup> (Memmi 1996 : 41-47). Their social ubiquity (multipositioning), in various policy sectors, venues and at various levels of government blurs boundaries between these different fields. Acting as “double agents” between the national and the international spaces (they can import at home what they have built abroad and vice-versa), these brokers help strengthening the universal legitimacy of Epoque (Dezalay, Garth 2002), “disseminating” the programme and building international consensus on

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<sup>31</sup> One has to acknowledge that it is less obvious with communication professionals from an agency doing business.

CBl. As such, the president of the Bulgarian association for the study of obesity can strengthen even more the relevance of the Bulgarian Epode programme (which he is coordinating) that it is partaking of a scientific programme with an international dimension; in other words, a programme that is twice universal. Same for the managing director of the Epode programme in Canada, Dennis Edell. Although he is not himself an academic, he is like ennobled by the internationally renowned scholars he publishes with. And so on and so forth. Taking advantage of this “double comparative evidence”, every local team is promoting its programme in reference to an international trend which it is in turn contributing to sustain (Dubois 2007).

To conclude, Epode’s « circular circulation » as well as its surrounding consensus are even more strengthened by the prestige associated with the recognition of legitimate international organisations, WHO and EU Commission (which anti-lobby lobbies qualify as *blue-washing* ; Bruno, Karliner 2000). Three times, this philanthropic network was co-funded by the Health Programme of the EU Commission : 700 000 euros for the *Epode European network* in 2007, over one million euros in 2012 for *Open* (Obesity prevention by European Network) and probably around the same amount for the EPHE project – Epode for the Promotion of Health Equity<sup>32</sup>. Quite significantly, the last programme asserts on its website : “The endorsement of this body [the European Union] is significant as it underlines the credibility of the project and facilitates its outcomes dissemination across Europe<sup>33</sup> ». This philanthropic network is like ennobled and certified by – to update Pierre Bourdieu’s witticism – « the [European] central Bank of symbolic credit that is [the Commission] » (Bourdieu 1989 : 538).

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<sup>32</sup> These health projects were funded in addition by Nestlé, Mars, Ferrero, Orangina-Schweppes and Danone.

<sup>33</sup> <http://www.epestory.eu/> [last accessed : 26 July 2017]

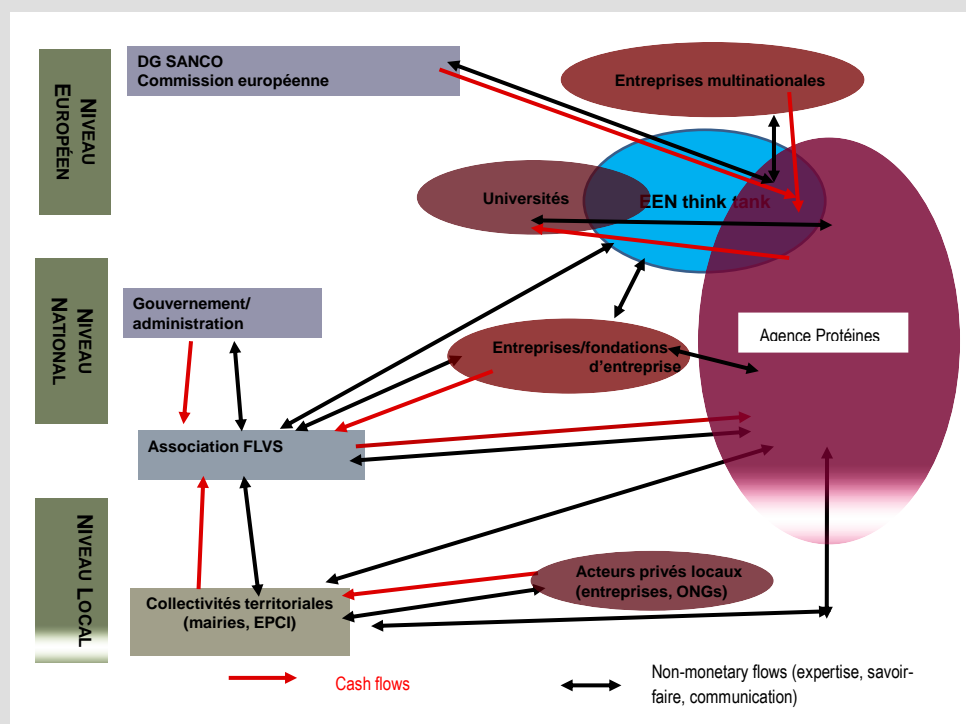


## CONCLUSION

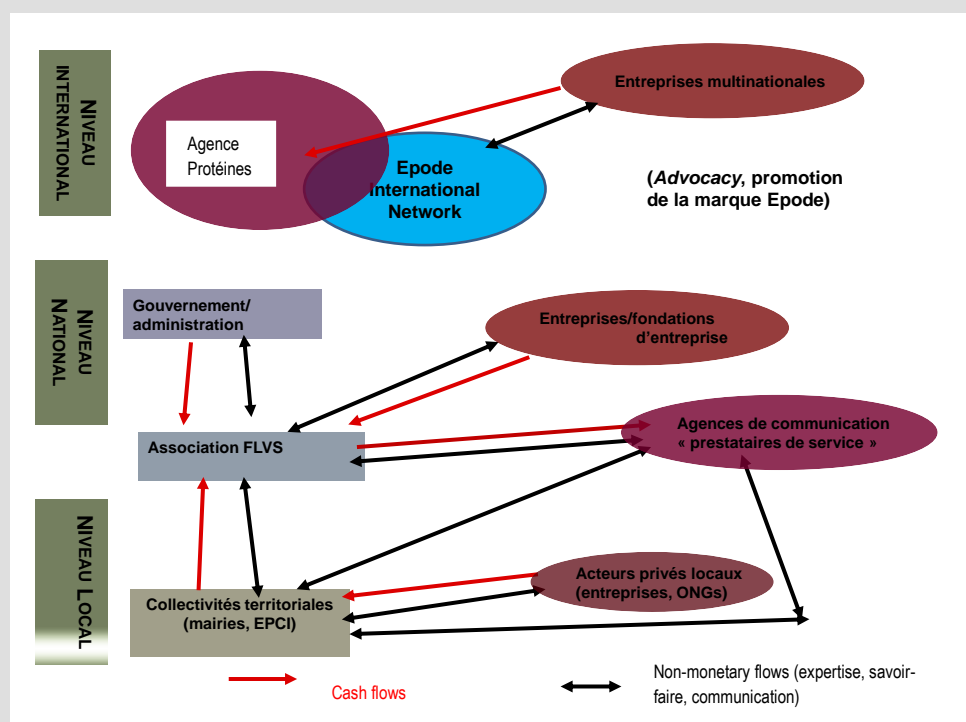
Building on a micro-sociological and monographical study resorting to ethnopraxis, I have exposed the structuring, functioning and core activities of an original *think and do thank* whose historical dynamics can be traced back to the 1990s. In the interstitial field of think tanks, I have illustrated how different social worlds have been connected, an assumption that is often taken for granted. Indeed, how paradoxical it is to gather around a health prevention programme not only communication agencies and food industries but also academics who count in the scientific field and political institutions representing the public interest? I think I succeeded in offering ethnographic accounts to support the idea that brokers– located in the communication agency – managed to build a convincing story based on “boundary work” and “monstration” where expertise and internationalisation are mutually reinforcing. More, my insider’s position in the think tank enabled me to observe interdependent social games that are developing in multi-level scenes and which are not clearly perceptible behind window display. Beyond simplistic analyses in terms of “capture”, I have partly given account of the complexity of collusive transactions where each actor finds specific interests in the exchange. As I entered the black box of think tanks, I not only give first-hand experience and “poignant descriptions” (Katz 2002: 83) regarding the tailoring and use of scientific resources but also evidence of power struggles within the think tank, expertise being a political and symbolic resource as well as an issue of conflict. Eventually, my contribution to the think tank offered cognitive resources for the FLVS president to denounce the contract that linked in France, Protéines and Epode, an outcome definitely not expected by the agency (frame 3). But it had no impact whatsoever on PPPs as the French programme still rests on the same principles while Epode’s methodology is further consecrated with the development of Epode International Network and the EU funding of OPEN and EPHE.

### Frame 3. From Epode to VIF (Vivons en forme), the programme's multi-level governance

#### Epode (and Protéines)'s golden age : 2008-2011



#### Dissociation between Epode International, Protéines and VIF (since 2011)



In 2011, the president of the FLVS association, Monique Romon – who I was working with in the work package on PPP – denounced the contract with Protéines agency. She realised that the agency had captured the programme (brand registration, royalties) and claimed it used FLVS as a « cash cow » as it billed excessive fees. It all seems that agencies had become simple service providers. Yet, it should be noted that two of the four permanent staff of FLVS (including, Christophe Roy, the head of the programme) are former employees of Protéines. The same prevails for the owner of the actual partnering communication agency, Sandrine Raffin (who was laid off by Protéines in 2011).

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