



Luc Maene

Having been based in France for the past 20 years as a trade association manager, I have had many opportunities to witness how national behaviours are so deeply rooted in a country's business culture. I have, in particular, observed the linkages or the lack of them between national, European or international business associations. In fact, ESAE is closely associated with its sister organization in the United States, ASAE, whose numerous activities and initiatives are facilitated by the fact that it is operating at the national level. In

FROM NATIONAL TO REGIONAL TO INTERNATIONAL: WHAT LEVEL MATTERS FOR TRADE ASSOCIATIONS?

THE NATURE OF TRADE ASSOCIATIONS HAS CHANGED DRAMATICALLY WITH GLOBALIZATION MOVING FROM MOSTLY NATIONAL STRUCTURES TO REGIONAL AND, IN MANY CASES, INTERNATIONAL ENTITIES. BUSINESS SECTORS IN THE EUROPEAN UNION ARE VERY WELL AWARE OF THIS BECAUSE OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF EUROPEAN TRADE ASSOCIATIONS EVER SINCE THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE COMMON MARKET. DESPITE THE NECESSITY TO INTEGRATE AT THE REGIONAL LEVEL, NATIONAL BEHAVIOURS, PRACTICES AND PRIORITIES HAVE NOT DISAPPEARED ALL TOGETHER IN ORDER TO ALLOW A MORE CONCERTED WAY OF DOING BUSINESS. IN FACT, IN MANY COUNTRIES, NATIONAL ASSOCIATIONS HAVE MAINTAINED A STRONG LEADERSHIP ROLE.

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Europe, there is a clear lack of communication, which can be explained by the heterogeneity of the membership: cultural differences, diversity of languages, variation in country sizes all contribute to building obstacles to unified action.

Yet, much can be learned from national experiences and some could be used at regional level. In France, **CEDAP (Centre d'Etudes des Directeurs d'Associations Professionnelles)** is the national society representing trade association and federation executives. In 2004, CEDAP worked jointly with the French certification agency **AFNOR (Association Française de Normalisation)** to establish a quality certification for professional associations named "Quali'Op". The

certification programme monitors if business associations render the services they advertise to their members. It also aims at sharing best practices.

Another example of a project supported by CEDAP is that of the professional index card. The profession of association executive is neither well-known nor well-recognized in France. CEDAP decided to advertise this profession more widely by partnering with a leading executive employment agency. A professional index card was drafted defining the function, its main missions, a common career path and its key aspects (skills, personality, compensation, etc.). A survey was undertaken in parallel in order to study the common profile of today's executives.

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I believe that both initiatives are of great value for our profession and could definitely benefit other organizations in Europe especially following its enlargement. Unfortunately, the good examples and lessons to be learned rarely reach beyond the national borders.

ESAE clearly has an important role to play in identifying innovative initiatives and experiences, assess whether they are very context specific or whether they can be of benefit in different contexts. With appropriate human resources and financial means, ESAE could be the vehicle to strengthen the profession of association executive in Europe.

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