

REALIS, a support network for social innovation



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In 2006, the union of production cooperatives in Languedoc-Roussillon (SCOP) began putting together a set of complementary measures, which now provide a framework to support social innovation and the development of the social economy in the region.



Languedoc-Roussillon, in the south of France, has two distinguishing characteristics: a rapidly growing population, with many people attracted by the region's climate and quality of life; and a high rate of unemployment, about 14.5% of the workforce.

Non-traditional activities

In 2006, activists in the social economy identified a significant cohort that had the desire to create new activities, but without wanting or being able to create traditional businesses. Recognising that the appropriate tools did not exist to support these activities, which demonstrated considerable potential for job creation and for addressing unmet social needs, this "cooperative activists" group decided to work together to build a new set of tools and services.

A supportive environment

Seven years later, and with the benefit of EU and regional support, the following instruments have been established:

- ALTER'INCUB, a social economy project incubator, which supports about a dozen new projects every year. Since its inception, ALTER'INCUB has facilitated the creation of around 30 social enterprises,

operating mainly in the environment, ICT, health and culture sectors.

<http://www.alterincub-lr.coop/>

- REPLIC, a cooperative with public and private members that creates social and environmental businesses in response to identified needs in the area. It has so far established eight cooperatives, operating in the areas of recycling, transport, eco-mobility and hospitality. Together they employ 70 people, including 35 who are in professional insertion.
<http://www.replic.fr/>
- COEPTIS, a school of cooperative management, which seeks to strengthen the managerial and governance practices of companies in the social economy. With its ten permanent and 45 consultant teachers, COEPTIS offers three curriculums and accepts 200 trainees per year
<http://www.coeptis.coop/index.php>
- COVENTIS is an annual business convention for businesses operating in the social and solidarity economy. Targeting both professionals and the general public, it brings together more than 130 exhibitors to present their actions, services and solutions.
<http://www.coventis.org/>

- The REALIS Business Hotel was opened in December 2013 at a cost of around €10 million, which was financed by the Region and the EU. It can accommodate 30 to 50 social economy enterprises and is also the main meeting point for social economy stakeholders in the region.

To complement these tools, specific funding has also been put in place to support the creation and development of social economy enterprises. REALIS was one of five projects selected by the REVES Excellence Award. REVES is the European Network of Cities and Regions for the Social and Solidarity Economy. It has also inspired social economy policy in several other French regions.

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