

## PLASTICS VALLÉE - Oyonnax, France

<b>Background</b>	Plastics Vallée is located in a valley in the département of Ain, the nearest large city being Lyon. It has a history of manufacturing going back 150 years. But the beginning of the 19th century signalled the transition from a cottage-based production process to a major manufacturing centre. The advent of celluloid further transformed Oyonnax's key industry: comb manufacturing, making Oyonnax famous for its product. After the Second World War, another transformation of local industry occurred; the plastics industry took off and was able to establish itself on the local, national and international markets. This expansion and this competence are such that the Oyonnax area is now known as "Plastics Vallée".
<b>Purpose of the project</b>	To develop a cluster of plastic industries.
<b>Geographical focus</b>	Depending on the activity: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Oyonnax employment area; Departements of l'Ain and the Jura</li> <li>• Rhône-Alpes and Franche-Comté regions</li> </ul>
<b>Partnership arrangement</b>	The project is led by Agence de Développement Economique de la Communauté de Communes d'Oyonnax.
<b>Have you involved other tiers of government in the project?</b>	Yes, public sector organisations from the district, Department and regional level have been involved.
<b>Target groups</b>	Businesses specialising in plastics
<b>Particular successes</b>	<p>Now there are over 1500 companies which are responsible for all stages of the plastic industry including: design, mould production, machinery manufacture, polymer processing, finishing, decoration, recycling.</p> <p>The cluster is a classic example of an enterprise milieu constantly adapting and evolving to meet the challenges of market change and competitiveness demands. Local industries and business leaders possess exceptional entrepreneurial skills and the concentration of continuously innovative specialist plastics firms has allowed Oyonnax successfully to maintain its leading position for research and development in the plastics sector. The majority of businesses in the valley have been founded by families or individuals that live in the area. Here, local embeddedness is a given and not one that has to be installed as an act of policy. The improvement and development of R&amp;D activities and training in the Oyonnax area.</p> <p>Oyonnax has withstood the impacts of global market forces and continues to be a leader in plastics manufacturing research and innovation. For example, as plastics manufacturing became increasingly technical, it was recognised that to maintain a competitive edge, research and development of new technologies and production techniques would need to be enhanced at the local level. Thus, in 1989 the 'Pole Européen de Plasturgie' (PEP) was established. This centre for research and innovation in the plastics sector has allowed the region to stay at</p>

	<p>the forefront of innovation in plastics and plastics manufacturing technology.</p> <p>Improved skills levels of the local workforce; the project has also led into creation of the Ecole Supérieure de Plastique (ESP), which trains future plastics manufacturing engineers. This ensures that industries in the area can recruit suitable persons to fill the project manager and technical supervisory positions necessary across the whole plastics sector. Furthermore, the development of the Lycée Arbez Carme since its foundation in 1978 has helped train local people in the skills required to work in the production side of the plastics sector, thus helping to contribute to the development and maintenance of a suitably skilled local workforce of technicians.</p> <p>In addition to the engineers and technicians, industries in the Plastics Vallée also need a lower skilled workforce to undertake more general tasks in the production process. Typically, this workforce has been provided by immigrants into the area, and the Oyonnax valley has a culturally rich workforce. However, more recent waves of employees have not possessed sufficient educational qualifications and skills to undertake even the most basic of tasks. But faced with a lack of workers from this sector of the workforce, many businesses would lose the ‘backbone’ of their personnel. To combat this basic skills shortage in the local labour market, business in the Plastics Vallée has collaborated with organisations such as the ANPE (the French national employment agency), in developing training schemes to bring the basic skills levels of the local labour force up to a satisfactory level. One such scheme, named ‘Action de Développement des Compétences’ (ADC) was founded on an agreement between industrial partners and the ANPE worked on training job seekers for the work needed by local industry. Upon successful completion of training, the job-seekers received a certification validating their training, which increased their employability. Simultaneously, this created a bigger pool of sufficiently skilled workers for local industry.</p>
<p><b>Lessons learnt</b></p>	<p>This centre of international excellence in plastics technology cannot be attached to a single person or a planned act. It is in a real sense a product of the milieu itself - a particular setting, its people and its local culture.</p> <p>Maintaining and developing a skilled local workforce has been vital to the continuing success of Plastics Vallée. Linked to the issues of adaptability and innovation, the area has continually sought to maintain a local pool of high skills. During the nascent stages of the development of the Plastics Vallée, high levels of skills and qualifications were not particularly required in the workforce since many of the businesses in the region had been created in rudimentary settings, including people’s garages. However, the increasing level of technical refinement in the plastics sector has meant that specialist skills in the plastics sector have become more sought after. Not only are increasingly specialised engineers required, but also skilled technicians to operate machinery, monitor processes, and undertake other production tasks that have become more sophisticated.</p>