
CASE STUDY: SARL Cité de l'Initiative, Roubaix, France

Background

The Cité de l'Initiative is an association of 26 enterprises established in 1994. It is based in Roubaix in the north eastern part of the wider Lille conurbation. The core mission of the Cité de l'Initiative is to support the local textiles and clothing sector through various means, including business networking. This local initiative has its origins in the Roubaix company nursery, with 18 of the enterprises involved based at a single site in re-used industrial space.

Activities

The basic principle of the Cité de l'Initiative is the sharing of resources, including techniques, technologies, management and communication tools and human resources, in order to reduce the enterprises' fixed costs and enhance their competitiveness and access to new markets. This approach has been found to be particularly suitable for very small enterprises and SMEs as it offers the most effective basis for sharing of resources and achieving diversification.

The companies also prioritise the employment of groups disadvantaged in the labour market, including the long-term unemployed and young or handicapped people, through insertion activity. As a result, some 37% of those employed at the site are from these groups.

Partnership

The Cité operates as a French association under the law of non-profit organisation managed by a limited company (SARL) in the form of a Union d'Economie Sociale (UES or Social Economy Union). The partnership is broad, involving the local authority, Région, Département, urban community, national government, EU, consular bodies, European networks, schools and training institutions, trade associations and professional unions, major customers and funding bodies.

Lessons

Key lessons from the experience of Roubaix are that:

- local partnership approaches can reduce the fixed costs of SMEs;
- providing premises that can host several SMEs in the same sector provides important advantages through sharing information, resources, expertise, etc.
- locating several social enterprises in a single site facilitates the provision of specialist support, for example in the operation of insertion programmes for disadvantaged groups.