

Editorial

INEES for OPERational research

INEES was created in 1998 and has recently appointed an office manager to develop its activities.

What are its aims? To become a European beacon of excellence in the field of the solidarity-based economy (SE).

What are its activities? The exchange of good practices, conceptual research, acting as an advocate for the recognition and appreciation of the SE, as well as lobbying the various institutions.

Its programme? This is currently being put together, but several areas have already been identified:

- Definitions of the solidarity-based economy – the field of research
- Identification and networking of the actors in the solidarity-based economy at both the European and worldwide level
- Monitoring of, and involvement in, events, seminars and conferences
- Drafting of proposals for an environment and/or legal framework that is favourable to the SE.

We should bear in mind that since one of the main values of the solidarity-based economy is participation and making the most of available resources, this programme will benefit from the support of all of those who wish to contribute to the INEES activities.

What about its means and resources? It will benefit from financial aid provided by the Objectif Plein Emploi Network (OPE - cf. article opposite) for a two year operational period, it will have a monthly newsletter (starting with issue n° 0 which you are currently reading), which will provide information at both an internal and external level, as well as a biannual publication that will carry more detailed articles, a resource centre and in the future it will certainly become involved in European projects and will provide advice to the public authorities.

What is the nature of its relationship with the OPE? Several of OPE's active operators are INEES members and Romain Biever (cf. interview overleaf), one of OPE's two managing directors, is the President of INEES. In fact, INEES could be compared to a company foundation that is not directly involved in its development but which, with objectives that have been defined at a higher level, has set its sights on opening up new horizons and legitimising (including in terms of economic theory) OPE's activities in Luxembourg and also within its European and worldwide context. INEES intends to work close to the ground and will work, how can we put this.... in a highly OPERational way.

Eric LAVILLUNIERE

Brief CV of Eric LAVILLUNIERE

40 years old – 2 children – began his career as an activist in this area in the early 1990s at the Réseau d'Économie Alternative et Solidaire (REAS in France, then at MB2) – ran a solidarity-based economy pole in Auvergne and has been involved in several projects concerning organic farming, fair trade, culture, the wood-energy industry – joined CECOP (European Confederation of Workers' Cooperatives) in Brussels in 2001 and worked on the issues of Corporate Social Responsibility, the social enterprise and relationships with the social movements, particularly within the European Social Forums.

Presentation of the INEES

**INstitut Européen de l'Économie Solidaire (INEES) ...
... closely linked to the OPE...
... created to deal with fundamental paradigms**

The beginning

It is not possible to understand what led to the creation of the INEES without delving into the history of the Objectif Plein Emploi network (cf. http://www.ope.lu/fileadmin/files/livre_8.pdf, in Fr.). Without wishing to go into too much detail, it should be noted that this Luxembourg-based network was created out of the desire to pool the ambitions and the know-how of a body known as the "Action Sociale pour Jeunes" which, since 1984, at the time of major industrial restructuring in the country, had been working alongside young people, helping them to plan their future careers, and of the OGB-L trade union which was looking to go beyond its traditional vocation of defending workers' interests and had decided to explore new ground and to invest its efforts in seeking out new solutions for people that did not have a job.

The European dimension came very quickly to the fore (in 1988) and was given concrete expression through OPE's active participation in the EGLEI network (European Group for Local Employment Initiatives) and this allowed for many exchanges on local development and employment initiatives. Because the OPE was particularly keen to pursue and develop the cross-border dimension of its work, it decided, when the EGLEI network became less active, to set up the INEES in 1998 with researchers and/or practitioners from the solidarity-based economy from Luxembourg, Germany, Belgium and France, as well as from Switzerland.

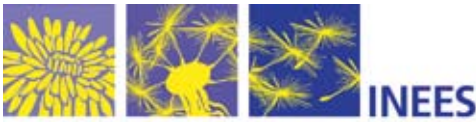
Development and consolidation

The OPE network expanded rapidly during this period, increasing its staffing level six-fold between 1996 and 2003, to reach a total number of 650. The staff were divided between the OPE itself (created in 1999) and the 30 different Centres d'Initiative et de Gestion Locaux (which were either regional or sectoral – otherwise known as the CIGL/R/S), that were gradually established to respond to local needs in terms of community-based, cultural, tourism, environmental and other similar services.

It is impossible to refer to all of the activities carried out by these Centres, but the CIG in Esch/Alzette, for example, operates a multi-media training area, a video production centre, a cyber café, a crèche facility, a bike lending scheme, an "environmental" team that looks after green areas, a "community-based services" team that carries out housework, DIY, and other services for the elderly in particular, a "highways" maintenance team, a socio-ecological team that works in a cross-border park (maintenance work, marking out paths, looking after outdoor furniture, etc.). In other words, close to 40 people are employed at this site.

In 1999, France took the innovatory step of creating a Secretariat of State for the Solidarity-based Economy, thereby inspiring a more dynamic approach at European level. For its part, INEES organised a European seminar on "Local development, an effective instrument of the solidarity-based economy", which was held in Longwy in April of the same year.

Continues overleaf



Interview of the month

Romain Bieber, President of INEES and Managing Director of Objectif Plein Emploi

We have looked at the aims of INEES and why it has been created, but could you tell us a bit more about what you would like this network to achieve?

Since INEES will be working at an international level, the work carried out by this network will enable us to develop a coherent and homogenous European concept of the solidarity-based economy. This will not be limited to purely scientific work. On the contrary, we expect it to produce concrete results both at a political and an economic level.

But how do you intend to function?

We have joined forces with partners of international renown who have vast experience in the field of the solidarity-based economy, since each one is an expert in a different, specific area. In this way we will be able to develop a concept that is based both on practical experience and on theoretical knowledge.

So can you tell us who these partners are?

Our partners are institutes, universities, research centres, European projects and several networks that represent the social and solidarity-based economy.

It would seem that your approach is fundamentally European, but what can the socio-economic actors in Luxembourg get out of this?

This presents Luxembourg with the possibility of developing a solidarity-based economic system that is both solid and sustainable and which could become the 3rd pillar of the national economy. Indeed, the present coalition government has expressed this ambition for its current term of office.

If I have understood correctly then, INEES, led by its Luxembourg-based partners, would like to become a driving force in the promotion of a theoretical corpus in favour of the solidarity-based economy. But is that not perhaps a bit too ambitious?

No. After all, our experiences at OPE are a worthy example to follow. By combining them with the experiences of others, we will benefit immensely from the contributions made by everyone.

Compiled by Christina Schürr

The members of INEES Anne Da Rin-Jaulin, Romain Bieber, Romain Binsfeld (OPE – Lu), Catherine Leroy (Fondation Rurale de Wallonie – Be), Friedrich Seibel (European Centre Community Education Koblenz – Ger), Gérard Vautrin (Centre Universitaire de Coopération Economique et Sociale Nancy – Fr), Heinz Ries (Universität Trier – Ger), Isidor Wallimann (Höhere Fachschule für Soziale Arbeit Basle – Sw), Nikola Löns (Université Luxembourg), Suzanne Elsen (Fachhochschule München – Ger).

The following are also involved in the work carried out by INEES: Antonella Noya (LEED Programme - OECD), Claude Wehenkel (Centre de Recherche Public Henri Tudor (CRPHT) – Lu) and Laurent Gardin (Centre de Recherche et d'Information sur la Démocratie et l'Economie (CRIDA) – Fr).

Presentation of the INEES (continued)

The strengthening of partnerships and involvement at the European level

Having firmly established its roots at a local level, the OPE then collaborated with the INEES to put together a training course specifically for local development agents in the entire region (Interreg 3A funding obtained in 2003), organised its first national conference for the network's volunteers in 2001 and commissioned CRIDA (Centre de Recherche et d'Information sur la Démocratie et l'Economie), which was certainly the first body to conceptualise the solidarity-based economy in France, to carry out an in-depth audit of its activities. In keeping with this idea of comparing its own impressions and feelings with other European experiences, the OPE became involved in the OECD's LEED Programme (Local Economic and Employment Development), set up its own Local Action Plans (LAPs) that fit within the European Employment Strategy (EES) and became a member of the European Network of Cities and Regions for the Social Economy (REVES), that works in the field of partnerships between local authorities and the social economy. At a national level, the OPE played an important role in initiating the efforts to create the platform for the social and solidarity-based economy. This platform brings together 12 socio-economic organisations that all share in the same desire to build a coherent, global political model and to be a credible discussion partner for the government. In March 2005, together with LEED and CEP-CMAF (European Standing Conference of Co-operatives, Mutual Societies, Associations and Foundations), the network organised a European Conference with the title "The social and solidarity-based economy, a central actor in social cohesion and the Lisbon strategy", under the auspices of the Luxembourg Presidency of the European Union.

A decidedly forward thinking approach

The Objectif Emploi network has decided to invest more heavily in INEES at the beginning of 2006. Its intentions in doing so are quite clear. Its 20 years of activity are an excellent demonstration of its capacity for social innovation and the establishment of partnerships with local authorities and citizens' networks. However, this is a network that is both fragile and strong at the same time. The winds of liberal policies that are currently blowing across EU countries would like to reduce the solidarity-based economy to playing the role of a second-class economy (to include all of those that have been excluded from the dominant system) and to restrict its activities to the provision of cheap public services (community-based services). The OPE could subscribe to this approach and negotiate the best possible form of support from the local authorities in order to guarantee its own development. However, it has different ambitions: to establish its activities on a long-term, sustainable basis, between the public sector economy (with its traditional activities) and the conventional private sector economy (with its capital-based, wealth-generating companies), as part of a new social contract that is shared in by all of the stakeholders at all levels and underpinned by mixed methods of financing (private, public and voluntary resources). The dogma according to which "the only thing we can redistribute to make good the damage caused by the market economy is the wealth generated", has great resonance in today's world. INEES is being urged to draw strength from its networks and to argue the case in favour of the social, economic, cultural and environmental "productivity" of its achievements and to display the relevance of "working in a different way", which is worn as a badge of honour by all of the actors in the social and solidarity-based economy (together with the co-operatives, the mutuals, community associations and everyone that is able to identify with this set of values). **To those that hold only certainties, we will oppose not only our questions and doubts, but also our convictions...**

Eric LAVILLUNIERE