

Chantier de l'économie sociale; an intersection of networks for the social economy development

Since 1999 the Chantier de l'économie sociale has worked to promote the social economy as an integral part of the socio-economic development of Québec and to promote recognition of the pluralistic nature of the Québec economy.

The Chantier strives to promote and support the emergence, development and consolidation of social economy organizations and enterprises in all sectors of the economy.

The organization stands out for its ability to enable productive cooperation among civil society actors for the development of the social economy, hence the meaning of its name, *Construction site* of the social economy, which refers both to a place and a working group.

(In Quebec, the social economy consists of approximately 7000 enterprises; these are cooperatives and non-profit organizations working in 20 economic sectors (arts and culture, food, retail, the environment, collective real estate, leisure and tourism, information technology and communications, media, manufacturing, personal services, etc.). The social economy employs more than 125,000 people and generates a turnover of more than \$ 17 billion annually, which accounts for approximately 8% of Quebec's GDP)

ACTORS INVOLVED

The Chantier actively contributes to forging strategic partnerships between all those who undertake, accompany and intervene in the social economy and that is why participation in the decision making process of men and women, representing different sectors and regions involved in the development social economy, is a tremendous asset.

The voluntary membership of numerous various types of entities and organizations reflects the interest in a democratic dialogue in the SSE that gave rise to the Chantier initially and is today one of the characteristics and strengths of the organization.

The Board of Administration of the Chantier is composed of 35 elected directors from collective enterprises (associations and cooperatives) networks (both sectoral and territorial), social movements (representatives of the labour movement and of women organisations) or development agencies. The Board plays a role of guidance and strategic positioning. The Chantier de l'économie sociale has strong ties with the regions of Quebec through direct partnership agreements with 22 regional poles mainly composed of social economy enterprises and the regional organizations that support them. The poles' mission is to promote the social economy and to enable dialogue and partnership between local and regional stakeholders of the social economy in order to coordinate actions and maximize the impact initiatives of and for the SSE.

Government responsibility for the social economy has been entrusted to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs, Regions and Land Occupancy. The Ministry develops policies and government strategies to promote the development of the social economy and ensures their implementation.

"The history of the Chantier de l'économie sociale is the one of men and women that from more than one hundred years, are mobilize to meet the challenges of their time and the needs of their communities. The Chantier de l'économie sociale is born with this same energy and this same necessity."

HOW THEY WERE IMPLEMENTED

In March 1996, the Working Group on the Social Economy was established in preparation of the Summit on the economy and employment of the same year. The Group had six months to evaluate the potential of solidarity initiatives present in all regions of Quebec. Given the enthusiasm and dynamism apparent as a result of this process, the Working Group was invited to continue its promotion and development work for another two years.

At the end of this period, a lot of work had been done but the achievements of the social economy, though tangible, needed to be strengthened and its development over time within the Québec's socio-economic structure ensured. As a result of the identified need for a permanent dialogue on the SSE, the Chantier de l'économie sociale was created as a non-profit corporation during its foundational General Assembly in April 1999.

The Chantier works according to the principle of subsidiarity, i.e. it relies when possible on the work of territorial and sectorial actors to create favorable conditions for the promotion and development of the SE at the provincial level.

In addition to the regional poles of the social economy, local development agencies such as CLDs, CDRs, CDCs, and CDECs and sectoral federations and networks are partners of the Chantier and contribute according to the realities in their territory.

IMPACT

Since its creation, the Chantier has maintained a constant dialogue with the provincial government to advocate for the implementation of public policies favorable to the development of the SE. Its ability to conciliate the different actors of the SE has earned it significant recognition from elected officials.

Its members are responsible for many of the advances in the Quebec economy such as the development of natural resources, access to culture, poverty reduction, the revitalization of communities, local access to services in small communities, environmental protection and improved inclusion of young people in rural areas.

The Chantier has developed several tools to create favorable conditions for the development of the SE. It has worked with several actors for the development of social finance and has created its own tools to finance SE enterprises; the Investment Network of Quebec (RISQ) and the Chantier de l'économie sociale Trust. It has developed Commerce solidaire, a commercialization tool for SE enterprises. It manages the portal for the social economy in Quebec, monitors the state of the SE across the province of Quebec, maintains the International Centre for Referencing and Networking on Public Policy for the SSE (RELISS) and participates in the promotion of the SE at the international level

AUTHORS—COLLABORATORS—SOURCES

Centre RELISS

www.chantier.qc.ca; www.fonds-risq.qc.ca
www.fiducieduchantier.qc.ca

Economiasocialequebec.ca

