Cocotte Numérique
(France)
Working Document

This case study was prepared in the framework of the ENRD Thematic Work on Smart and Competitive Rural Businesses (https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/thematic-work/smart-and-competitive-rural-areas/rural-businesses_en) that was running between August 2016 and July 2017. A comparative case study was developed entitled 'Revitalising rural areas through digitisation' based on the experience of Cocotte Numérique and other two rural digital hub examples: #hellodigital (Scotland) & Ludgate Hub (Ireland) – see separate case examples.

FACTS

Location: Murat region, France

Timing of the initiative: From 2005 (ongoing)

EAFRD-funding: None

Other public funding:

- The original public service centre (2005): EAGGF: 800.000 €/ 80% (20% from the Association of Local Authorities)
- Télécentre of Murat (2007): €50.000 by Auvergne region and Cantal County region
- La Cocotte Numérique Co-working (2011): €160.000 (ERDF Massif Central: €53.000 & €107.000 national funding [FNADT] and regional/county funding)
- La Cocotte Numérique Fab Lab: €130.000 (works & equipment), national funding (Green growth and positive energy fund) and region Auvergne
- ESF Funding was provided to support the training programme

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Short description of the project

The Hub is situated in the small market town of Murat in the southern Massif Centrale in France. The origins of 'Cocotte' lie with a **public service hub** set up by the association of local authorities of the Murat region in 2005. From the beginning, it included a **multi–media room, internet access, digital education and training** and tools to support the delivery of **public services in a remote upland area**.

Visitors and regular users of the centre soon began to ask if a 'quiet working space' could be added to the facilities. A **distance working centre** (Télécentre de Murat) was opened in 2007, a training centre was set up in 2008-2009, and a web-site and the first distance workers' forum in 2009.

By the end of 2009, **6 digital entrepreneurs settled in the area and set up businesses following training**. The work hub had 100% occupancy and a '**welcoming' strategy had been put in place** to assist new inhabitants and their families to settle in the area.

In 2010-2012 the programme attracted digital entrepreneurs and a full-time coordinator in the area through National and ERDF (Massif Central) funding. In 2011 the predecessor of 'Cocotte' was set up as the **first co-working space in the Cantal** with an increasing set of activities.

Summary of main results:

- ✓ On average **5 new entrepreneurs (and their families) settled in the area each year** (total of 43 entrepreneurs).
- ✓ CoCotte Numérique attracted a total of **98 new residents** to the area.
- ✓ **Education Centre** (including access to computers and wifi, and a young people's corner).
- ✓ Strong emphasis on **territorial marketing**; especially to show to young people that setting up businesses in rural areas is a viable alternative

1. SETTING UP A RURAL DIGITAL HUB

1.1 Specific conditions that make it possible to set up a rural digital hub?

- The origins of 'Cocotte' lie with a **public service hub** set up by the association of local authorities of the Murat region in 2005 (that provided reliable connection, but through ADSL).

- **Good and affordable local support services**: including support to people through ESF-funded training programme to set up their own digital business and 'welcoming programme', which gave support to families to settle in the area (e.g. for finding a house, subsidies for rent, help partner find work or set up business, help kids to settle into school).

- **Broadband connection**: ADSL 2 to 4 mbps connection was available from the moment the original public service hub was set up. The ADSL connection (available in 2005) gradually evolved over time to fibre (100mbps) in 2017[1].

- **Building and equipment:** Murat was chosen as it is the administrative centre of the region and had the relevant infrastructure, especially the building, which was renovated to accommodate the hub. The building was equipped with multi-media rooms, computers, desks. A co-working space was set up; individual 'open offices' are linked to open co-working space, meeting/training room and conference/seminar room with video conferencing facilities were also set up.

1.2 Who initiates and is involved?

The hub was initiated by the Association of Local Authorities (chaired by president Bernard Delcros) including the Town/Village Councils of the Murat Sub-Region. The Association of Local Authorities has delegated responsibility for economic development. Murat is the largest village (small town) and the administrative centre of the sub-region.

At the local level, an important cooperation was established between the elected representatives, public officials, local business and population. The area is characterised by small population (6000 in 13 communes) and close cooperation between relevant stakeholders. The local population was involved through surveys and consultations.

1.3 What resources are needed?

a) Financial resources

The hub was set up from 100% public funding (see above under 'Facts'):

- For the original public service centre: €800.000 (80%) was provided from EAGGF and the remaining 20% from local funding. This centre (set up in 2005) offered access to computers, internet, basic ICT training as well as public services (such as social services, job centre, youth support).

- The Telecentre of Murat (2007) received €50.000 by Auvergne region and Cantal County to help setting up the first official distance working spaces (4 offices) on the ground floor of the building.

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[1] The fibre network was set up through a regional initiative funded by the Regional Council of Auvergne (using national funds as part of a PPP initiative with Orange Telecom): http://www.auvergnetreshautdebit.fr Murat is one of the locations with FTTH (Fibre to the Home) – Feb 2017.

- The Cocotte Numérique Co-working received €160.000 that covered the recruitment of a 'welcoming coordinator' and the development of a welcoming strategy and covered some of the related equipment, building and interior decoration costs.

b) Human resources

One full-time coordinator worked on setting up the hub, with line-management from the president of the Association. The Association of Local Authorities also supported the setting up of the hub through the contribution of its Director of Communication and other staff, especially supporting fundraising activities, financial planning, planning of building and refurbishment (contracts management with architects, etc.).

Challenges of setting up #hellodigital

- A big challenge was to **create 'welcoming/inward migration' support service and territorial marketing** to attract new entrepreneurs (at the end 43 new entrepreneurs settled in the area together with 98 family members).

- To **change ideas of young people** in the area to show them that they have services and support that can allow them to build a future in the local area: they have all they need locally and do not need to 'emigrate'.

- To **keep the local area 'attractive'** to incomers, not only landscape and heritage but changing the image of rurality to be associated with innovation and entrepreneurship.

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2. RUNNING THE RURAL DIGITAL HUB

2.1 What activities is the hub carrying out?

a) Office and co-working space for businesses

Co-working (100 square meters space) and digital work hub office space (6 private offices), video-conferencing/conference and seminar facilities.
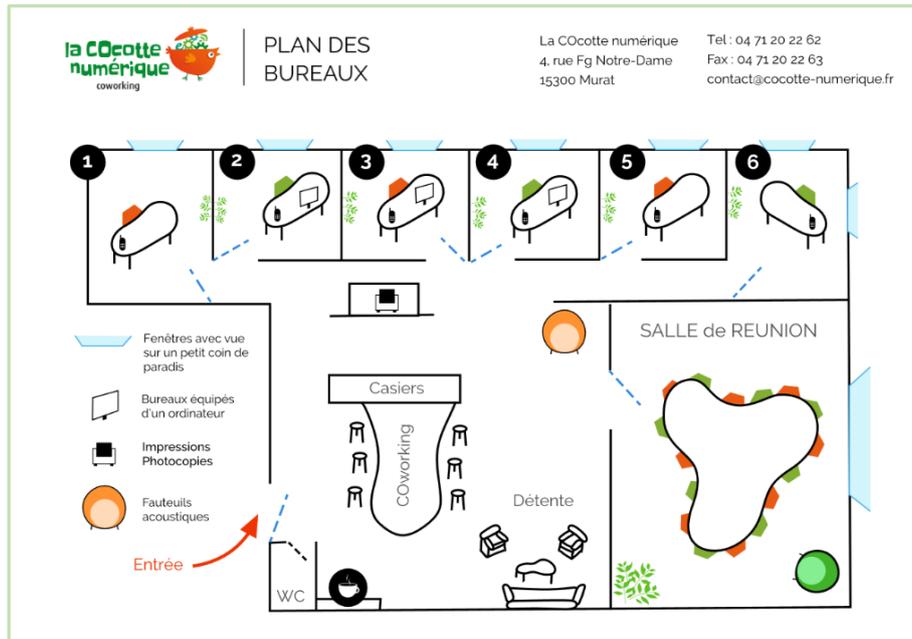
b) Offering services for businesses

The following services are offered for entrepreneurs in the Cocotte Numérique Digital Hub:

- **Training/coaching for digital start-ups** and independent workers, networking events and space, incubator services (on an occasional basis). In 2008 and 2009 training programmes were implemented with participants from outside the county, that later attracted new businesses to the area. In 2012 – 2015 the hub improved its training services (see below).
- **Start-up competition**, including providing publicity and platform.
- **Annual Digital Working Forums** (since 2009). The 7th Digital Working/Start-Up Forum in 2016 focused on the collaborative economy, which with the Cocotte also promoted entrepreneurial and collaborative values in its work.
- In the original hub, the county-level Chamber of Agriculture established remote agricultural support services.

In 2012 – 2015 the services offered by the hub diversified with **improved training/business support with a focus on younger people**, accreditation for the '**welcoming' and business support services**, more use of **external coaches/experts.** In 2015 the Hub was rebranded the **'Cocotte Numérique'** with its users now including a cooperative 'Appuy Créateurs' dedicated to supporting employment creation and start-ups.

The Hub acts as a **meeting place and networking centre for other activities** such as a Women Entrepreneurs Club, a Translators 'Café', and most recently the setting up of a Fab Lab that has become a great focus for local businesses and entrepreneurs.

c) Space and services for the wider rural community

- 'Welcoming' service for incoming digital entrepreneurs and their families.
- Fab Lab that also serves more general educational and training purposes.
- Public Digital Service and Education Centre including local offices for social service & job centre (for unemployed people), access to computers and wifi, and a young people's corner.

2.2 What resources are needed to run the hub?

a) Financial resources

Estimated (yearly) running cost of the hub is around €110.000 (mainly covering staff costs).

The hub generates its own income through training fees, rental of co-working spaces and other services. Rates for renting an office for half, one, 6 days, unlimited use of the space for a year and private office for a month is presented below. 5-day training course on setting up digital businesses costs €100 per person, and fee-paid training courses for public authorities on developing distance working and businesses are also available. All fees go to the Association of Local Authorities (Pay de Murat) that has an accredited training centre.

Tarif COworking tarifs TTC	
1/2 journée	6 €
1 journée	10 €
6 jours	40 €
Adhésion annuelle illimitée	80 €
1 mois avec bureau privatif	100 €
JE RÉSERVE	

A la COcotte j'ai accès à :
- 100m² de bureaux et d'espaces de travail partagés, avec vue sur les montagnes
- 6 bureaux privatifs vitrés et ouverts sur les autres espaces
- une ligne téléphonique
- une connexion WIFI
- une connexion SDSL haut débit
- 3 ordinateurs
- un point bureautique avec imprimante-scanner-photocopieur
- deux fauteuils acoustiques pour s'isoler ou passer un coup de fil
- des salles de réunion
- une salle de visioconférence

b) Human resources

The hub is run by 2 full-time equivalent staff (FTE).

The Association of Local Authorities (village/town councils or communes) owns the Hub, the Director of Local Development and Innovation has direct responsibility and the local authority and elected representatives were involved in coordination and management of the hub. The hub contracted experts for training and events. For the Fab Lab 2 posts are funded.

Specialist skills for running the hub include:

- Training consultants,
- Communication and networking,
- 'Welcoming services by hub staff,
- Fab Lab run by hub staff,

- Special events organisation,
- The hub staff supported by consultants for start-up forum and competition.

c) Community involvement

Users are consulted and were involved along with the local population in consultation exercises at each stage of the hub's development.

2.3 What are the outputs, results and long-term sustainability of the hub?

a) Outputs & results

As a result of Cocotte Numérique, on average **5 new entrepreneurs and their families** have settled in the area each year (over past 8 years), a total of 43 entrepreneurs and their family members, which has reversed population decline with subsequent impact on local business revenues and viability of public services. 7 new local businesses have been set up through the 'Start-Up Chef' competition launched in 2014.

By 2017 the project attracted a total of **88 new residents** to the area. New income has impacts on local economy, gives new dynamics to territory, results in less out-migration of young people. The Hub resulted in improved territorial marketing.

Cocotte facilities are regularly used by 22 co-workers/ new digital entrepreneurs or project leaders.

Over 1.000 entrepreneurs participated in the Annual Forum since its launch in 2009.

An economic impact study of the overall programme was launched in 2013 which confirmed the success of the programme (see infographics below).
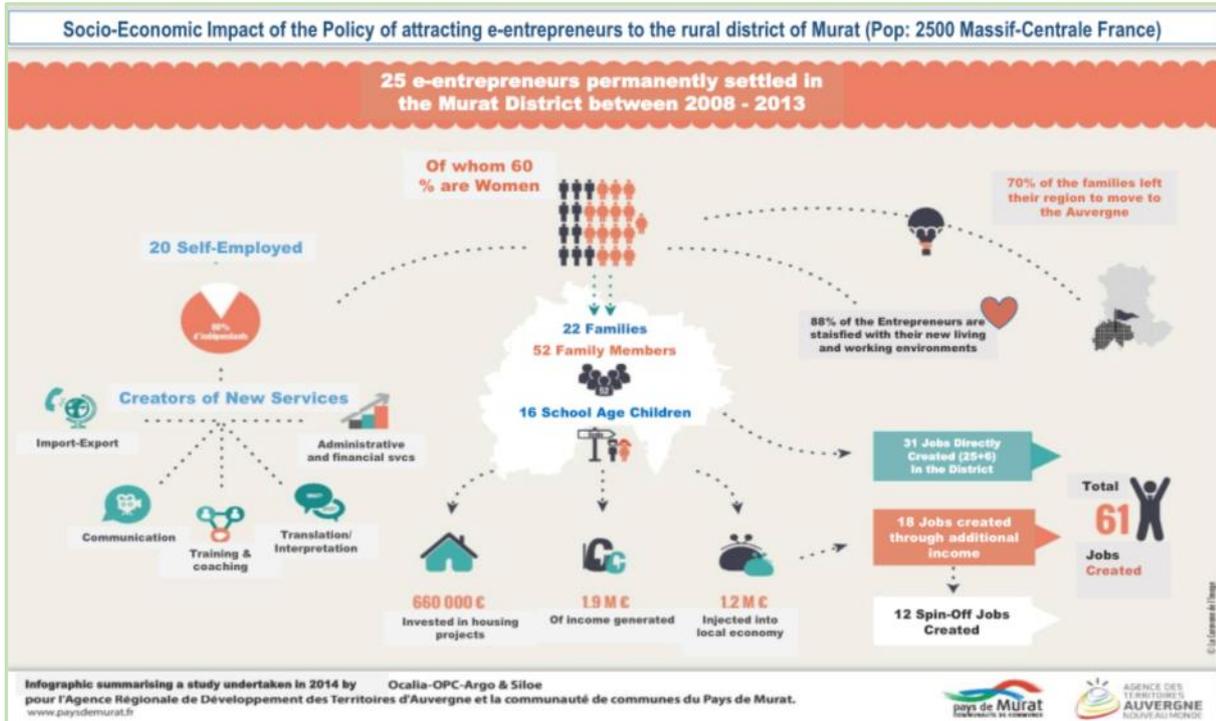
b) Sustainability

Sustainability is ensured through the long-standing commitment from public funding supported by Return on Investment Study, as well as the revenue from delivery of services such as training for future digital entrepreneurs.

If you had to give an advice to those who are planning to set up a digital hub what would it be?

Ensure political support, ensure good communication, provide comprehensive business and 'welcoming' support to entrepreneurs and their families, ensure balance between providing services to local entrepreneurs and incomers, continuously innovate and build on your achievements.

Corinne Ibarra Director or Communication, Territorial Marketing and Innovation Cocotte Numérique

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