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<sup>1</sup> For the "Technical resources  
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<sup>2</sup> For the "Business life" seminar

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## SOLIDARITY : THE STORY OF THE RÉSEAU COCAGNE NETWORK

by

**Jean-Guy Henckel**

Director, Réseau Cocagne network

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Report by Élisabeth Bourguinat

Translation by Rachel Marlin

### Overview

In the region of Franche-Comté in eastern France in the 1970s, industry threw thousands of workers on the scrapheap. Social workers felt powerless to help these people who had been excluded, and yet were keen to work. An idea was developed to create companies to provide them with work. Jean-Guy Henckel, a youth worker in a shelter, set up a carpentry workshop for social integration with a few colleagues and so became a 'social entrepreneur'. In 1991, because of the continued increase in the number of unemployed, he created the first Jardin de Cocagne. It followed a concept which combined the principle of a distribution circuit with a few intermediaries which, in this case, were people who were also members of the association ; social integration by means of employment ; and finally the strict rules of organic farming. Today, its successor, the Réseau Cocagne has more than 100 gardens which exist to provide jobs and integrate people into society. It includes 3,000 gardeners, 500 executives, 1,200 volunteers and 12,000 members who are also customers. It has remained loyal to its founding principles.

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## TALK : Jean-Guy Henckel

My story begins in the middle of the 1970s in the Franche-Comté, a region situated between Burgundy and Alsace which is strikingly different from an economic point of view. I was born in the north of the Doubs *département*. This is an area dominated by the car industry between the towns of Sochaux and Montbéliard, and characterised by a collection of small towns which have factories in their centres. In the 1970s, this car industry employed 44,000 people from a total population of 200,000. The south of the *département*, around Besançon, was characterised by the watch-making industry and included a university. Finally, the area situated near the mountains was very rural and conservative.

Having studied sociology and trained as a social worker, I completed a period of work experience in which I met adults living in difficult situations. I decided to work with these people and was employed by a shelter in Besançon which provided accommodation for the homeless. In the 1960s, there were people who were more like characters in Jack Kerouac books (such as 'On the road' and 'The Dharma Bums') rather than the homeless people of today. Those people from the 1960s had made a conscious decision, without being forced, to be on the margins of society. The shelter was founded by a prison visitor who had been moved by Abbé Pierre's appeal in the winter of 1954 on behalf of the homeless. Since its creation in 1957 and up until the early 1970s, it was organised, in a way which was usual at that time, with large dormitories and staff recruited more for their bulging muscles than their educational skills. When I was hired together with two other specialist youth workers, we wanted to establish a completely different sort of social intervention system.

### Companies for the unemployed

At the same time, we started noticing the arrival of a new category of people at the shelter, people who were very different to those who were already there. They were no longer 'voluntary marginals', but people who had lost their jobs because of the economic situation and reluctantly found themselves in a situation where they were excluded from employment. Having been employed full-time, they were now faced with a situation where some people found it increasingly difficult to find work. The shelter accommodated more than 80 people who did not know what to do with themselves and also hated being there. The atmosphere was increasingly unbearable and there was occasional violence. We started by completely transforming the accommodation, replacing large dormitories with individual bedrooms.

We, the social workers, also introduced the new concept of creating companies for these people who wanted to work and could not find a job. This seemed absurd, although it had appeared in different regions of France, especially in the North and East, at the same time.

A great deal has been written about the origins of the social integration of disadvantaged people by means of economic activity, but I think that it simply emerged from the enormous pressure put on social workers in both shelters and youth clubs which were located in difficult areas. Social workers either had to give up their jobs, or find a credible alternative for the people in their care other than the interminable wait without almost any hope of finding work.

At the time, there was more talk about 'social testing' than 'social integration by economic activity'. We progressed by trial and error like most social innovations. The choice of our initial area of activity was made quickly and slightly by accident. Three or four of us were preparing a feasibility study. One of us had been a carpenter before becoming a social worker. We decided to look no further, and launched ourselves into carpentry.

## **A favourable context**

The people at the social services department were astonished when we presented our business plan to them. However, they proved to be very open-minded and directed us promptly to the relevant government ministry. At that time, before decentralisation, it was enough to convince someone in the ministry for a project to be launched. Today, one has to discuss it with 25 different people, none of whom is able to take the decision alone.

For this first project, we also had the advantage of a very favourable local cultural heritage. The pioneers of the social movement, Fourier, Proudhon and Considerant, all came from the Franche-Comté, and this region was characterised by the co-operative social movement. In view of the unproductive features of the soil and the climate, only actions of solidarity enabled small farmers to make ends meet. Even today, the entire production of Comté cheese is from co-operatives. The same was true of the industrial sector. Our shelter was 300 metres from the Lip factory which was famous for its methods of self-management. Charles Piaget, one of the trade union leaders at Lip, was a member of our board of directors. The self-management of the Lip factory by workers was no accident. Over a certain period of time, it had become customary for workers to meet in the workshop in the evenings in order to resolve collectively various difficulties which had been encountered during the day's work.

## **Carpentry experience**

We took advantage of this co-operative and self-management culture to launch our carpentry workshop. We entered the market for medium-range and lower-end-of-the-market wooden outdoor furniture which we sold through distributors such as COOP, Rallye and CAMIF. This worked well until the 1980s, when Italian and Romanian companies started importing huge amounts of synthetic resins, and our distributors started experiencing serious problems. As a result, we had to change our production, but this workshop still exists today and continues to employ about thirty people.

We learnt a great deal from this initial experience, including how to manage an operating statement, understanding how a balance sheet works, devising a sales pitch, managing employees who had once been homeless, handling public relations, and so on.

## **Institutional action**

As time went by, the economic situation continued to deteriorate and the authorities created laws to deal with social integration through employment. The first attempts were in 1972 and the first bill appeared in 1979. The trigger for social innovation never comes from a governing body : it is people in the field who draw up new solutions.

It was the Department of Health and Social Security's bill (no. 44) which paved the way for the creation of the CAVAs (*Centres d'adaptation à la vie active* : Centres which help marginalised people – or people who have problems in adapting – become socially integrated into the workplace). As unemployment and social exclusion became worse, new forms of social integration through employment appeared, with Martine Aubry's Law against Exclusion (1998) and Jean-Louis Borloo's Plan of Social Cohesion (2003). As well as companies which have been established to help these people find work, there are now 'intermediary' associations : if one needs a person to do the housework or mow the lawn, one can call one of these associations which will send someone to do the task for money. There are also temporary work agencies for social integration as well as workshops, training centres, employers' associations for integration and obtaining qualifications, and even local government councils.

## Training

In the 1960s, illiterate people could find work easily. Illiteracy was not an obstacle to finding work on car production lines. In the Peugeot factory, it was not unusual to see people who today would belong to a CAT (*Centre d'aide par le travail*: Centre to help integrate handicapped people into the workplace) spend the whole day doing nothing. With the advent of economic downturns and pressure from competition, companies were forced to 'rationalise' their management, and their employees became the first victims. Standards required for employment became increasingly high. We realised that it was no longer enough simply to provide people in difficulty with accommodation, and try to integrate them into the workplace. They also had to be trained. Enquiries at various professional training centres showed us that our workforce was not very attractive because the people in it were too much on the fringes of society to be managed easily. Therefore, we created our own training system.

We realised that there was a further difficulty : to be able to accept employment, one had to be mobile, and many of our people did not have a driving license. In France, the government and the council of each French *département* pay for driving lessons for people who are excluded socially. However, many driving schools make a profit out of them, exploiting them as much as they can by ignoring them during the theoretical lessons to make sure they take a long time before they pass their test. So we decided to create our own driving school which had the status of an association.

### The concept of the Jardins de Cocagne

At the end of the 1980s, there was an important event. The Prime Minister at the time, Michel Rocard, decided to establish the RMI (*revenu minimum d'insertion*), a minimum benefit paid to those who had no other source of income. Every French citizen who had a monthly income of less than 2,000 Francs and was able to prove it was eligible. The procedure was simple. One had to give one's name to a social worker or to register at the local town hall. One year after the RMI was launched, a review showed that the number of people eligible had been largely under-estimated. In our region, many farmers had fallen significantly into debt because of payments made for farming equipment, or because they had made bad strategic choices. Many of them only had a very low income and applied for the RMI. In the Doubs *département*, about 400 people were eligible. I was asked to devise a means of integrating people into the workplace which could be adapted to these people who came from rural and farming backgrounds.

At first, we thought about creating a farming business, but buying a farm and cattle was a colossal investment. It was an agricultural engineer, François Plassard, who first told me about short distribution circuits for agricultural produce which existed in the United States. Farmers there ensured that they had a loyal circle of consumers who had promised to buy everything that they produced. I researched the topic and discovered that the idea had started in Japan in the 1960s and had spread to a number of countries, including Switzerland.

Near Geneva, market gardeners had created a farm which covered a few hectares, and sold all their produce to an association of city-dwellers. At the beginning of the year, each member of the association gave a sum of money corresponding to the price of a weekly basket of vegetables over a one-year period. This money helped to pay the staff and the rent for the land, and reimbursed the loans for the equipment used. The members of the association called themselves 'consum-actors'. They also promised to give one or two days' of their time every year to help harvest the vegetables and manufacture the baskets.

The concept of the Jardin de Cocagne developed from both the use of short distribution circuits and the desire to integrate people back into the workplace.

## The project launch

My contacts in the *département* council and in the prefect's office were once again surprised when I showed them my project. Ten years later, by accident, I met the civil servant to whom I had shown the original project, and who had since been transferred elsewhere. She confided in me that they had all thought I had 'blown a fuse' ! All the same, they had trusted me because I had already proved myself in other projects and, as in poker, they decided to gamble several thousand Francs, just to see.

### *Land*

I managed to convince a farmer in Chalezeule, the village where we had our shelter, to lease us some land. When I told him that we were going to start growing crops, he burst out laughing. He was not laughing so loudly a year later when he saw a news report about us on national television ! The mayor of Chalezeule also helped us to find land. He was very interested in the project because his village was one of the few where the land had escaped being converted into housing estates which were growing up all around Besançon. Since there were fewer and fewer farmers, he was afraid that the same would happen to Chalezeule. This experience taught me that to construct a project, one has to bring together different interests. Everyone needs to have the same objective even though each person may have different reasons. One should not conceal or give up the objective in any way, because that is what gives strength to the whole activity.

### *Equipment*

Because I managed to obtain finance from various sources, we were able to buy some equipment. When I was at a training course in Nancy, I met someone who had created a mushroom farm, and whose workforce was made up of people from the fringes of society. When prices fell dramatically, the farm went bankrupt. I bought all of its equipment including the greenhouses and a mobile home, for 100,000 Francs.

### *Workforce*

We agreed that first and foremost we would employ those receiving the RMI who had farming backgrounds. One of our first surprises was that the people who were most interested in working for us were not those from the countryside, but town-dwellers. We recruited about ten such individuals who were supervised by qualified technicians. We immediately chose organic farming methods because they have very strict specifications which guarantee that our clients receive quality products. Organic agriculture is one of the most technological methods of cultivation which exists, which is why one has to ask for expert help.

### *Clients*

We also used a short distribution circuit. In order for the business to be viable, we had to find about sixty families who were ready to pay the yearly sum of 2,500 Francs to receive a weekly basket containing four or five vegetables throughout the year. Our second surprise was the incredible success of our advertising campaign which would have made the best advertising agencies green with envy. We only needed to distribute about one hundred low-quality pamphlets, photocopied in black and white, to find the sixty families we needed. We achieved this in record time. The climate at the time was in our favour as a result of stories in the news about food scandals, such as dioxin-contaminated chickens, mad cow disease, and scrapie. One newspaper had even entitled one of its articles 'Death is hovering over our plates'.

Having found the land, the equipment, the workforce and the clients, we followed Voltaire's precept and started 'cultivating our garden'.

## **The three elements of sustainable development**

The reason our initiative received favourable attention can be explained by the fact that it epitomised the three elements of sustainable development, notably the economic, environmental and social aspects. Ordinarily, the three do not go together : the social aspect often exists at the expense of the economic element, and giving priority to the environment often has repercussions on the social aspect. Nonetheless, we managed to make all three function at the same time.

As far as the environmental aspects were concerned, it was obvious that we needed to use organic farming methods. After 15 years, agricultural land becomes much richer in biological diversity.

However, organic farming methods were also justified from an economic point of view because they are becoming increasingly popular, even though their popularity is less marked today. Furthermore, vegetables produced from organic farming methods have a higher sales price than ordinary vegetables for which there are good reasons.

From a social point of view, the choice of organic farming methods was equally easy to defend. We employ people who come from very precarious situations, and we do not want to complicate their situation with work conditions which might be dangerous to their health. Surprisingly, conventional market gardening businesses use alarming quantities of pesticides and fertilizers.

Finally, the poor are frequently restricted to jobs which are not very attractive. For example, I have seen prisoners made to make rat traps. If one deals with people who are deprived, it is important to give them activities which have lots of meaning and are rewarding. We think that producing high-quality vegetables which have a strong added value is the answer.

### **Social conscience**

Many organisations asked our member-consumers to explain their motivation. Their questions included 'Do you buy these vegetables because a) it helps people who are in difficult circumstances ? or b) the vegetables are organic ? or c) the vegetables are produced locally ?' These subdivisions were meaningless because we satisfy all three criteria simultaneously. All three aspects are important to our consumers.

Lévi-Strauss once wrote that in order for food to be good to eat, people needed to feel good about its origins. Most of the time, we know nothing about the economic, social or environmental conditions in which the goods we consume are produced. In the Jardins de Cocagne baskets, there is always a little booklet which gives information about the aims of the association, the farm, and the vegetables available. One member explained during an interview 'What I like about the Jardin de Cocagne vegetables is that they tell a unique story.'

### **Rain in the desert**

A few months after the launch, a journalist from Agence France Presse was interested by our initiative and wrote in the press : 'In Besançon, marginalised people are growing organic vegetables and distributing them to member-consumers.' Word spread like wildfire. Within the space of a few weeks, all the national media came to interview us. After we had appeared on nightly national television news, the telephone did not stop ringing for three weeks. We were also televised on the satellite station, Canal+, and there was a programme about us on the Franco-German channel, Arte. The members of the 'first' team of gardeners had become stars overnight : they could hardly start digging without being photographed or filmed.

Throughout France, social workers, farmers, representatives from local authorities, and heads of business all found our initiative interesting and wanted to do the same. A computer engineer from Bordeaux who earned ten times my salary explained to me that he had had

enough of his job. He was depressed and he was very keen to work in one of our Jardin de Cocagne projects. The effect was like rain in the desert : our project made all the seeds, which had been waiting for rain for years, suddenly flower all at once.

### **The Jardins de Cocagne charter**

We had to determine how our model could be used. There were two ways : the first was to take the idea and do what one wanted with it. The advantage of this is that it is very quick but the disadvantage is that people can change the idea and create something personal and not collective. The second way was to use the franchise method : one creates a brand, defined by a certain number of technical, human and communication criteria, and one appoints an operator who centralises and monitors the entire system. We chose an intermediary option. We allow local operators a certain amount of freedom to adapt the project which best suits their territory, but we impose a charter which includes four non-negotiable principles.

The first principle consists of employing people in difficult situations into areas which are attractive, and to offer them socio-professional support in order to encourage their return to a long-term job.

The second principle is the requirement to adhere to the principles of organic farming and to certify that the produce is organic.

The third principle is that we make the project managers market at least part of their production through a network of member-consumers. We feel that if we want to fight poverty (which currently affects 10 % of French society), it is very important to make citizens and consumers aware of it.

The last principle states that project managers should be in line with the local agricultural professional sector. We do not want the Jardins de Cocagne to be distanced from their professional area (which is agriculture and market gardening) because they have an additional social role.

### **The Réseau Cocagne network**

There are currently more than 100 Jardins de Cocagne which are cultivated by about 3,000 gardeners and 500 executives, with help from 1,000 volunteers. Vegetables are sold to around 16,000 member-consumers. In 1999, we decided to create a national network (of which I am the head) in order to ensure a rational approach, and also to offer some services.

#### *Keeping an eye on the different Jardins*

The first challenge consists of developing and monitoring new Jardins. As time goes by, we have acquired a great deal of experience in establishing new gardens. We are not trying to reproduce the same model everywhere, but our know-how is available to project managers especially to help them 'format' new gardens. Depending on the area of land available, we can calculate how many greenhouses are necessary so that the winter production is equal to that of the summer months. We also calculate the number of employees needed to avoid either having too much or too little work. In general, a ratio of seven people per hectare is ideal. The number of supervisors depends on the number of gardeners. Finally, one can estimate the number of baskets necessary and the turnover, and calculate the number of members required to maintain the right balance.

The network is also launching new projects, like the 'Fleurs de Cocagne', a company which aims to integrate people into the workplace, in this case, women, who make and sell bouquets of flowers.

### *Training and advice*

We have a national training centre in order to prepare our supervisors for their functions in the workplace. There are five supervisory groups : management, technical supervision, socio-professional helpers, administrative jobs and sales jobs. The ordinary gardeners are trained on site either by in-house training staff or by outside agencies.

We also offer advice to associations which experience difficulties in technical, fiscal, legal and social areas.

### *Quality*

We wanted to acquire a quality approach and we were influenced by methods which already exist. However, we did not find one which was entirely suitable. Some were focused on environmental aspects and others on social aspects. None of them took into account all the criteria which were important to us. Therefore, we set up a quality approach which applies to all the criteria of sustainable development.

### *Communication*

Finally, the network's objective is to inform local authorities, the media, and organisations which work towards social integration about our initiative. It is for this reason that I came to talk to you today.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **The quality of the vegetables**

**Question :** *Do your member-consumers have high standards with respect to the quality of the vegetables ?*

**Jean-Guy Henckel :** It is not only because our slogan is 'Cultivate solidarity' that our member-consumers have to agree to eat whatever we give them. The basis of our contract is that when they give us 10 Euros, we give them 10 Euros of high quality vegetables at a competitive price. Great care is taken to prepare the baskets, and if the vegetables are unripe or damaged, they are automatically removed. Some vegetables are quite unusual, such as Jerusalem artichokes, and we only sell vegetables which are in season : for example, we do not produce tomatoes in winter.

**Q. :** *In the past, I have had dealings with associations who have tried to sell me office supplies and whose aim is social integration. They say 'we are three times more expensive than anywhere else and our quality is inferior, but it all goes to help the poor.'*

**J.-G. H. :** We are totally opposed to these pathetic methods. We sell our vegetables more expensively because they are organic, and not in order to pay the wages of people who are in difficult situations. We insist on being totally transparent and we meticulously indicate the value of each basket so that at the end of the year the member-consumers can see that they are getting their money's worth.

On the other hand, I was hurt by a friend who criticised us, saying 'You make poor people work to produce vegetables to feed the rich.' Today, we give 10 % of our production free to our 3,000 gardeners and their families. We also intend to ask our member-consumers to contribute 1 or 2 Euros more per basket to a fund on a voluntary basis which will enable us to give our baskets to destitute families.



## Protecting the model

**Q. :** *Have you registered the Jardin de Cocagne brand ?*

**J.-G. H. :** Yes, but it does not provide sufficient protection. There are currently about ten gardens which do not bear our name (for example, they call themselves 'solidarity gardens' or some other such name), but have more or less copied our principles. We call them 'Canada Dry gardens'. We are not bothered by them unless they do something stupid which tarnishes our image. If that has been the case, we ask them to join our network and take advantage of our methods rather than trying to do everything by themselves.

**Q. :** *What sort of stupid things ?*

**J.-G. H. :** Some of them cannot guarantee the high quality or diversity of their produce, or their produce is excessively expensive. This may put off their clients and discredit the perception of short-circuit distribution. It is very difficult to grow between 70 and 120 varieties of vegetables and to guarantee 5 or 6 different vegetables every week. It has taken more than ten years to find a solution to this problem. We now have software which enables our permanent staff to devise 'cultivation plans' so that they know, on a day-to-day basis, the tasks which their teams must carry out in order to be sure of obtaining the desired result. It is an extremely precious device which we could share with managers of other gardens.

## The AMAP

**Q. :** *Some farmers sell their produce with the same system of member-consumers, but without a deliberate attempt at social integration. Do you have any contact with them ? Is there any competition ?*

**J.-G. H. :** These are the *AMAP* associations (*Associations pour le maintien d'une agriculture paysanne* : associations for maintaining rural agriculture) which were started by a group of farmers, ecologists and consumers from the *Confédération paysanne* (a French agricultural trade union). The first *AMAP* was started in 2001 in the south of France. We are not in competition, and in fact we devoted a special edition of our newspaper, 'L'Arrosoir', to the *AMAPs*, which sold 30,000 copies. However, our opinions differ regarding the application of our model. We monitor very closely people who want to create a Jardin de Cocagne, whereas any farmer can create an *AMAP*, regardless of his resources and skills and whether he grows organic produce or not. Consequently, the results are variable. I often hear stories from former members of *AMAPs* who say that they stopped being members because they were only delivered nettles for three weeks. Given this sort of situation, the client does not say that he is dealing with a bad producer, but that 'the system does not work', and this reflects badly on us. This is the reason why, in 2009, agricultural engineers in our national team are going to offer *AMAPs* (and other market gardeners who want to take part) training sessions.

Nevertheless, there are some *AMAPs* which work very well. Some Jardins de Cocagne work in partnership with them, allowing the *AMAPs* to sell a broader range of products, since they only produce fruit, jam, bread themselves.

## When the charter is contravened

**Q. :** *What happens when a Jardin de Cocagne contravenes your charter ?*

**J.-G. H. :** A garden has the right to get 'ill' but it has to make itself better. If it refuses, it may be excluded from the Jardin de Cocagne network. This happens on an average once a year, and is never a very happy situation. We only resort to exclusion when we have tried everything we can to rectify the situation. The decision to exclude a garden is never due to technical or financial problems as these can always be solved. Most of the time, it is because a manager has 'steered off course' and does not take any notice. The first Jardin de Cocagne opened in 1991. Since then, about fifteen gardens have been excluded from the network and three have been closed usually because they lost their seal of approval. As far as local

authorities are concerned, belonging to our network brings with it a technical, financial and social guarantee. When a garden is excluded from the network, the authorities may stop funding it.

### **Results in terms of integration**

**Q. :** *What sort of people do you employ ?*

**J.-G. H. :** They are 18 to 60-year-old men and women who are in one of the administrative categories eligible for social integration into the workplace. They include people who receive the RMI, as well as the long-term unemployed, people with handicaps, beneficiaries of a specific solidarity payment, single-parent mothers, and so on. They are sent to us by social workers or local youth initiative centres. We do not discriminate against anyone, and we are often sent people who are particularly difficult to reintegrate into society such as those who have recently received psychiatric treatment. If such people are sent to work in a restaurant, problems could arise. However, if they are sent to work in one of our gardens and start talking to tomato plants, it does not matter. Farming and cultivation are known to be very efficient ways of restoring oneself both psychologically and physically.

On the other hand, if there are fifteen drug addicts or fifteen alcoholics, the Jardin de Cocagne, or indeed any other similar social integration structure cannot function properly. In order to work efficiently, the team has to be composed of people of various ages and with different characteristics and problems.

**Q. :** *How long do these people stay with you and what happens to them afterwards ?*

**J.-G. H. :** The contracts for integrating people into the workplace generally last 24 months, but there are exceptions for certain categories of people. Martin Hirsch (the French high commissioner for active solidarity against poverty) is preparing a reform which will extend this to 5 years or more. What is the likelihood that an alcoholic, illiterate 58-year-old man will find a job in an ordinary company ? Such a placement may pose psychological problems for our supervisors. Having spent months helping someone give up alcohol, or solving his problems with the law, or finding a solution to his excessive debts, and having seen him happy again to the extent that he might join the petanque association in his area, it is discouraging to have to 'dump' him for administrative reasons and see him relapse a few weeks later.

Exceptions to the 24-month contract apply only to a small percentage of the people we employ. Most stay only for 12 to 13 months. This period is adequate in order to find a satisfactory solution.

One third of the people leave the garden with a job, most of them in areas other than market gardening. The Jardins de Cocagne are training grounds for a variety of jobs, and we can assess peoples' know-how and behaviour which they have acquired with us. We can also assess the qualities which have been strengthened in order to increase their suitability for the particular job to which they aspire.

Approximately 20 % of our gardeners go on to pre-qualifying or qualifying training courses.

Finally, we find solutions for 20 to 25 % of those unable to gain access either to a job or to training, which allow them to live decently. These include receiving finance from the Cotorep (*Commission technique d'orientation et de reclassement professionnel* : technical commission for orientation and professional redirection) for those who are mentally handicapped.

We have three group centres for those who are most handicapped. These include individual apartments, and provide professional group activities so that they can find the right balance and lead a decent life.

On the other hand, we are preparing to create genuine co-operative companies. These will produce organic vegetables using a much more economic model which is not to do with social integration, but which will be able to accommodate people who have either already been trained or who would like to become technical supervisors in a Jardin de Cocagne.

## Management

**Q. :** *What is your management style for your employees ?*

**J.-G. H. :** Some time ago, about forty human resources directors from small and medium-sized companies in the Lorraine region came to visit a Jardin de Cocagne. When they arrived, they wanted to teach us a great deal about management, but, by the end of the day, asked us if we could organise a training programme for them... They were amazed that we employed men and women, whom they would never have taken on, and that we were not only able to make them work, but their rate of absenteeism was lower than in their own companies.

The style of management we use is based on very simple but ingenious methods. The technical supervisor is very familiar with his team and realises that if there are two people who do not get along, it is better to make sure that they are not working together with their shovels and pickaxes in the same field. He also makes sure that if a lady is lonely and suffers from depression, she is in the same group as Monique or Thérèse who are very cheerful and make conversation very easily. The principle is simple : if people are happy at work, they will be one hundred times more productive than if they are reluctant to do the job. I am not saying that management is always easy, but for instance when 17 different nationalities are working in a garden together, we have to be very ingenious in order to cope with such a situation.

## Volunteers

**Q. :** *What is the role of your 1,000 volunteers ?*

**J.-G. H. :** All associations are faced with the same problem : the greater the number of paid staff, the less the opportunity for volunteers. We still have a large number though. They are on the board of directors of every Jardin, a board which consists of between 15 and 20 members, and the volunteers bring their management skills and event organisation talents to the board. We also have volunteers among our member-consumers. Some give computer classes to our employees, others volunteer to accompany them on cultural trips or give relaxation sessions or yoga. We also organise fairs or parties in the Jardins in the spring and autumn which require their help. There are also handymen who help out, for example, the man who was not at all interested in our association, but was crazy about mechanics and spent hours inspecting our tractors.

## The profitability of the Jardins de Cocagne

**Q. :** *Could the Jardins de Cocagne become profitable, or will you always need funding ?*

**J.-G. H. :** We carry out two jobs. One consists of producing and selling vegetables and is profitable. The other is about helping people who are in very precarious situations, socially and professionally. The latter cannot be profitable and cannot be financed solely by selling vegetables. The fact that our association exists to help these people saves the State a great deal of money : if there are fewer people who are excluded, there is less pressure on emergency services and social accommodation and fewer inmates in prisons. Such services are very costly to the State. A company which exists to integrate people back into society is not only less expensive, but also creates value and has a positive impact on its local area.

Today, we are trying to create structures in the network solely for economic reasons. We would then use the profits from them to finance projects which could never be profitable.

## Increasing the scale of the project

**Q. :** *The number of unemployed will probably increase in the coming years. Consequently, will we need to adjust the scale of our project ?*

**J.-G. H. :** Currently, everyone is conscious of the challenges with which we will be faced. These include economic, demographic and social changes as well as those affecting energy sources and the climate. In the light of these challenges, will the social and solidarity

economy, which currently represents 10 % of the GDP of France, be content to increase this percentage to 11 or 12 % in future years ? Some of us think that it is necessary to establish a new type of alliance between social entrepreneurs and large companies, similar to the partnership which Muhammad Yunus (the founder of the Grameen Bank) is developing with Danone. Some companies already have the capital and the power, while others will probably be the company laboratories of the future, but all of them can benefit from working together.

I would like to set up many Jardins de Cocagne in the Paris region where there is a large market, but the local authorities will only finance two such gardens. The mayor of a village in the *département* of Yvelines (one of the Paris region *départements*) has offered me 25 hectares of land. It would be a shame not to take advantage of this and develop organic farming there, and create jobs. I intend to establish a large co-operative called Cocagne & Co to grow organic produce. This project requires between 300,000 and 400,000 Euros. Only very large companies could help to finance this, and I am currently in discussion with several of them. I am suggesting that they put capital into the co-operative, based on the principle of 'one man, one vote', in other words, every member of the co-operative will have the same stake, 50 Euros, regardless of their financial status. Despite the principle of equal investment, large companies are still interested in our project because it might revolutionise the methods of organic farming and hence satisfy increasing demand.

Presentation of the speaker :

Jean-Guy Henckel : studied sociology. He has devoted himself to placing people in great social difficulty into the workplace. At the end of the 1980s, he looked for solutions to help the less fortunate who had been overlooked by social services after the RMI (minimum benefit paid to those who had no other source of income) had been established. He drew inspiration from the concept of co-operative gardens in Switzerland, and decided to use organic farming methods. He gave the whole enterprise a strong social character and conscience. The first Jardin de Cocagne was created in Besançon in 1991. Today, there are nearly one hundred in France, employing more than three thousand employees for a maximum period of two years. Once they leave the Jardin, more than half are then able to find work or suitable professional training.

Translation by Rachel Marlin (rjmarlin@gmail.com)