

RESET

CSR takes on its responsibilities

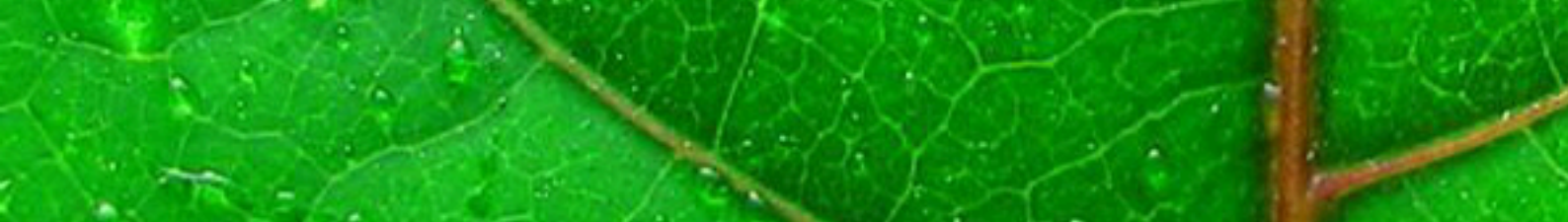


The CATT and CRAJ laboratories study the corporate social and environmental responsibility of the businesses in the French region of Nouvelle-Aquitaine. An ambitious project at the crossroads between economic science and law.

Born in the 1950s in the United States, the concept of corporate social and environmental responsibility (CSER) has since taken hold worldwide. "CSER covers the best practices introduced by businesses in order to promote and integrate social, environmental, societal and economic issues through the prism of sustainable development," explains Patrice Cassagnard, a researcher at the center for theoretical analysis and processing of economic data (CATT). Sometimes carried as a standard, CSER is most often materialized through a charter summing up the commitments of the company: responsible purchases, respect for the environment, exemplary work conditions, etc. On paper things look simple, but in practice it's a totally different ball game.

Arnaud Lecourt, researcher at the CRAJ (center for legal research and analyses) gives a more nuanced picture: first of all, the contours of CSER are not properly defined. There is still no firm boundary between soft law – i.e. what is done on a voluntary basis – and hard law – what is done out of obligation. Some principles promoted as values are the result of legal, prescriptive or regulatory obligations. Others, spun out in terms with no legal significance, are but good intentions. What's more, over 60.4% of French businesses with more than nine employees say they know nothing about CSER. And the smaller the businesses, the less informed they are. "Consequently, most French businesses see CSER as a useless constraint without realizing the substantial economic and social advantages they could gain from it," says the researcher regretfully. With his colleague Patrice Cassagnard, his resolute ambition is now to tackle CSER from a different angle, combining both legal and economic sciences.

The project called RESET (which in French stands for Corporate social and environmental responsibility in the region of Nouvelle-Aquitaine) was launched in late 2018 for a period of three years. Co-financed by the region of Nouvelle-Aquitaine and led jointly by the CRAJ and CATT laboratories, its initial aim is to assess how the land lies where soft law and hard law are concerned. For this



purpose, a questionnaire will be sent to the hundred or so businesses in Nouvelle-Aquitaine with more than 10 employees. The data gathered will then be econometrically analyzed based on a mathematical model designed by the team. In addition, the two experts in Pau will strive to build a regional network of researchers, which will undoubtedly prove to be a valuable and lasting tool for both public authorities and businesses.

Contacts :

 patrice.cassagnard@univ-pau.fr

 arnaud.lecourt@univ-pau.fr