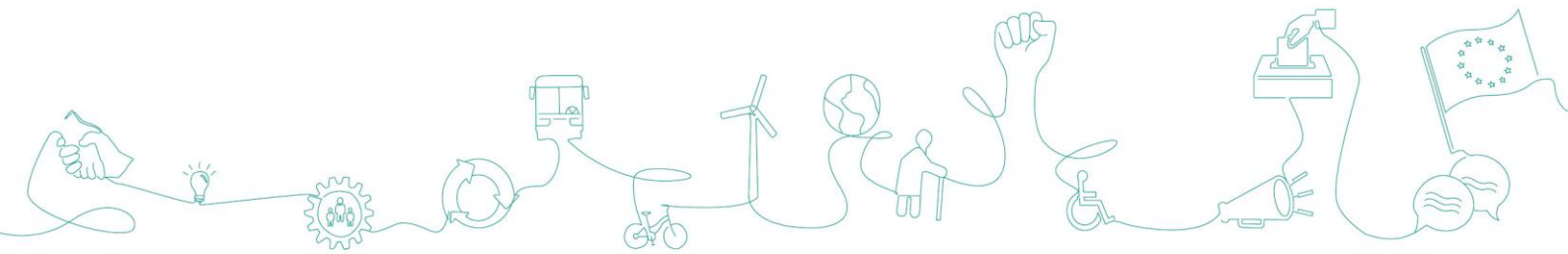
SUPPORTING TERRITORIAL ECONOMIC COOPERATION IN EUROPE TO ACHIEVE THE UNION'S OBJECTIVES

Clusters of social and ecological innovation as drivers of competitiveness, cohesion and the right to stay

Jointly written by Le Mouvement des PTCE, Coorace and POUR LA SOLIDARITÉ-PLS



Supporting territorial economic cooperation in Europe to achieve the Union's objectives

Clusters of social and ecological innovation as drivers of competitiveness, cohesion and the right to stay

Advocacy note - November 2026
For the attention of the EU institutions

pourlasolidarite.eu

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Economic and social divides, under-investment, insufficient access to public services, demographic decline: in the face of these challenges, the social economy, and in particular clusters of social and ecological innovation (CSEI), strengthen the dynamism, resilience and attractiveness of territories, in direct response to EU priorities: competitiveness, cohesion and the right to stay.

The 2028-2034 EU budget is being decided now. The European Council dedicated to the Multiannual Financial Framework meets on 26-27 November 2026, and the European Parliament is due to vote in December on the National and Regional Partnership Plans (NRPP) Regulation. The resulting framework will determine whether the facilitation of territorial cooperation remains fundable.

Our five key asks

1. **Make territorial facilitation explicitly eligible for EU funding** (NRPP Regulation, future ESF, ERDF) and assess it through suitable process milestones.
2. **Reinstate the social economy among the objectives of the future European Social Fund** and raise the NRPP social floor from 14% to 20%, as called for by the EESC.
3. **Secure regional chapters and territorial instruments in the NRPPs**, designed under the partnership principle with social economy actors.
4. **Make territorial cooperation a pillar of the Right to Stay strategy** expected in early 2027.
5. **Open EU cluster policy, FP10 and future territorial financing tools to CSEI.**

These asks are detailed in the seven recommendations set out in Part IV.

About this note

This advocacy note is jointly written by the **Mouvement des PTCE**, which represents and speaks for territorial economic cooperation hubs (PTCE) in France, and **POUR LA SOLIDARITÉ-PLS**, a European think & do tank based in Brussels.

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I. A PARTICULARLY STRATEGIC EUROPEAN CONTEXT

1.1. Resilience, competitiveness and attractiveness of territories: the social economy at the heart of EU strategies

This note contributes to the preparation of the EU "Right to Stay – Your Region, Your Future" strategy, launched by the Commission on 6 May 2026 and due to be adopted in early 2027[1]. The strategy builds on the Letta report on the future of the single market[2], which put forward the concept of "freedom to stay": freedom of movement must go hand in hand with a real possibility of living and working in one's home region.

The strategy aims to respond to territories marked by a "geography of discontent"[3]: demographic decline, lack of structural investment, insufficient access to public services. Many citizens denounce a lack of job opportunities and deteriorating public services, which deepen territorial divides to the benefit of metropolitan areas. Investment in peripheral or declining regions is therefore needed to balance freedom of movement and prevent people from leaving disadvantaged territories.

The Letta report also presents the social economy as a key dimension in strengthening the human and solidarity-based character of the single market, serving social justice, cohesion and inclusive prosperity. It highlights its contribution to job creation, poverty reduction and the provision of essential services. Finally, it calls for an environment in which social economy enterprises thrive on an equal footing with conventional

[1] European Commission, "Right to Stay Strategy: Your Region, Your Future", call for evidence Ares(2026)4622284, open from 6 May to 12 June 2026 Adoption of the strategy is announced for early 2027 (Commission press release of 12 October 2026, European Week of Regions and Cities).

[2] Letta, E. (2024). Much more than a market: Speed, Security, Solidarity. Empowering the Single Market to deliver a sustainable future and prosperity for all EU Citizens. Report to the European Council, April 2024.

[3] Rodríguez-Pose, A. (2018). "The revenge of the places that don't matter (and what to do about it)", Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society, 11(1), pp. 189-209; Dijkstra, L., Poelman, H. and Rodríguez-Pose, A. (2020). "The geography of EU discontent", Regional Studies, 54(6), pp. 737-753.

businesses and stresses their role in developing local communities and sustainable territorial ecosystems.

Published in April 2024, the report echoes several arguments of the Social Economy Action Plan adopted by the European Commission in 2021[4]. Reviewed at mid-term in March 2026, the Action Plan now emphasises the social economy's contribution to European competitiveness, resilience and strategic autonomy[5]. The social economy comprises 4.3 million organisations and 11.5 million jobs, around 6% of employment in the Union. It belongs to the "proximity and social economy" ecosystem, one of the fourteen industrial ecosystems monitored by the Commission since the 2020 industrial strategy, which accounts for around 6.5% of EU GDP, and up to 10% according to some estimates[6].

In a report published at the end of 2025, the OECD also recognises the social economy's contribution to "sustainable competitiveness"[7]. The social economy develops activities that carry social, economic and environmental innovation, contributes to the creation of quality jobs, directly and through training, and strengthens social and territorial cohesion by providing local responses to local challenges, which in turn increases territorial resilience.

1.2. A new budgetary framework that must respond to the social, ecological and economic challenges of territories

The 2028-2034 Multiannual Financial Framework is entering its decisive phase: the European Council meets on 26-27 November 2026 to discuss it, and the European Parliament is due to vote in December on the National and Regional Partnership Plans

[4] European Commission, Building an economy that works for people: an action plan for the social economy, COM(2021) 778 final, 9 December 2021

[5] European Commission (DG EMPL), report on progress of the Social Economy Action Plan, 30 March 2026 ; see also Pioneers Post, 1 April 2026

[6] European Commission, Transition pathway for a resilient, greener and more digital proximity and social economy industrial ecosystem, 2022, p. 3 (the 6.54% of GDP figure is taken from the Annual Single Market Report 2021, SWD(2021) 351 final)

[7] OECD, Social Economy in Europe, Executive Summary, OECD Publishing

(NRPP) Regulation[8]. The Commission's proposal profoundly reshapes the European Structural and Investment Funds by creating a single NRPP for each Member State.

By giving Member States more power over the management of these funds, the reform puts at risk the territorial dimension of EU policies, which is essential to support local projects and initiatives. Setting the priorities of a single fund at national level threatens to weaken support for the social economy, social innovation and, more generally, territorial cooperation projects, which would compete with other national priorities (agriculture, industry, competitiveness, defence).

The social dimension illustrates this risk. At least 14% of the NRPPs would be dedicated to social objectives[9]. However, the social economy, a specific objective of the current ESF+, is no longer among the listed objectives of the future European Social Fund[10]. The European Economic and Social Committee calls for raising the social floor to 20%[11].

Despite the aim of simplification, the NRPPs also rely on a performance-based logic: payments would be linked to the achievement of milestones and targets rather than to the reimbursement of expenditure[12]. While evaluating the actions of social economy projects and their results is necessary, a performance logic applied without regard to their specific features risks distorting social or environmental innovation projects. It also raises the question of how to fund territorial facilitation and innovation, which are essential to cooperation dynamics and whose effects are not always immediately quantifiable.

[8] European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS), briefing EPRS_BRI(2026)788161 on the state of play of the MFF 2028-2034 negotiations ; DG REGIO, presentation "Preparing 2028-2034", 2026 (indicative timeline of the plenary vote).

[9] European Commission, "The future European Social Fund"

[10] EPRS, briefing EPRS_BRI(2025)779265 on the future ESF

[11] European Economic and Social Committee, "A stronger European Social Fund for a more social Europe"

[12] Agence Europe, "MEPs voice doubts over governance and evaluation of future European fund under MFF 2028-2034"

II. CLUSTERS OF SOCIAL AND ECOLOGICAL INNOVATION: A EUROPEAN MODEL OF TERRITORIAL ECONOMIC COOPERATION ROOTED IN THE PROXIMITY AND SOCIAL ECONOMY

Clusters of social and ecological innovation (CSEI) are defined in a 2021 report by the European Commission's Expert Group on Social Economy and Social Enterprises (GECES)[13] as a "cooperation instrument" bringing together the social economy and traditional businesses, research and education, public authorities and civil society. The report maps CSEI across Europe and recommends, in particular, further research on these clusters and their integration into EU cluster policy.

These clusters bring together, in a given territory, a wide range of actors who cooperate to pool resources, strengthen their capacity to innovate and collectively increase their social and ecological impact. By jointly creating economic activities that serve the territory, they respond to its social, environmental and economic challenges. Cooperation thus becomes a genuine driver of economic development: it helps structure local value chains, pool resources, create jobs that cannot be relocated, and stimulate research, social innovation and skills development.

CSEI differ from conventional clusters in the place they give to the territory. While traditional clusters mainly use the territory as a factor of competitiveness and concentration of resources, CSEI see it both as a collective resource and as the very purpose of their action. Their cooperation aims less at developing a particular technology than at developing the territory in response to locally rooted social, ecological and economic challenges. This approach draws on many forms of innovation, technological, social, organisational, economic or democratic, and brings a diversity of actors together around a shared territorial development path.

[13] European Commission, Directorate-General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs (GECES), Clusters of social and ecological innovation in the European Union: perspectives and experiences. The role of clusters and similar forms of business cooperation in fostering the development of social economy, Publications Office of the European Union, 2021

CSEI also stand out through governance models drawn from the social economy: cooperative, associative or other multi-stakeholder models that allow stakeholders to contribute to strategy and decisions. Their territorial roots are strong: they emerge from endogenous dynamics led by local actors who create spaces for exchange and work around the territory's needs and resources. Their economic rationale goes beyond creating activities: it also aims to strengthen territorial autonomy and robustness by developing complementarities between local actors, consolidating territorial value chains and generating economic responses to unmet needs.

Through their actions, these territorial economic cooperation dynamics thus contribute to the competitiveness of European territories, to their economic and social robustness and to their green transition.

Focus: PTCE, the French model of clusters of social and ecological innovation

Territorial economic cooperation hubs (*pôles territoriaux de coopération économique*, PTCE) were recognised in France by the Social and Solidarity Economy Act of 31 July 2014. They bring together social economy enterprises, conventional businesses, local authorities, research and training centres, and are a major lever for cooperation-based territorial development. 245 PTCE are currently active in France: they develop economic projects that meet unmet territorial needs and show how actors can address the major ecological, social and economic transitions through cooperation.

PTCE emerge from territorial dynamics led by local actors. Local authorities are often their first partners: municipalities, intermunicipal bodies, departments and regions take part within their respective remits, particularly economic development, green transition, territorial solidarity and value chain structuring. They support in particular facilitation engineering, which remains insufficiently recognised and funded even though it is a strategic lever for coordinating actors, maturing projects and sustaining the initial momentum.

Circular economy, sustainable food, agroecology, community renewable energy, shared mobility: PTCE structure local value chains, pool resources and create jobs that cannot be relocated. They develop especially in vulnerable territories, deprived urban neighbourhoods or rural areas, where they meet insufficiently covered social needs.

Whatever their sector and approach, all PTCE perform three strategic functions: **territorial facilitation**, by mobilising local actors; **project engineering and implementation** in response to territorial needs; and **research, innovation and development**, either cross-cutting or formalised in an R&D project. Beyond their economic dimension, PTCE are spaces of cooperation and reflexivity where responses to local needs and action-based knowledge are built. By linking bottom-up civil society dynamics with public policy priorities, they open dialogue between actors who did not previously talk to each other and help build robust territorial ecosystems.

III. HOW CSEI CONTRIBUTE TO TERRITORIES AND RESPOND TO EUROPEAN CHALLENGES

3.1. Developing and structuring economic activities and supporting existing businesses

Territorial economic cooperation contributes to developing new economic activities and structuring value chains rooted in territories.

By bringing together complementary actors and moving beyond, at local level, purely competitive logics, cooperation projects enable the development of efficient and robust local value chains. Experimenting with new production models, based on cooperation between actors and on a comprehensive approach to the territorial value chain, makes it easier to share equipment and skills, consolidate activity volumes and create market outlets.

With their comprehensive approach at the crossroads of economic, environmental and social issues, CSEI enable the endogenous development of territories. Built on local skills and resources, cooperation creates the conditions for economically viable activities and jobs that cannot be relocated, and thus contributes to territorial resilience and to the competitiveness of the territory and of the businesses based there.

These territorial dynamics complement national and European value chains by strengthening local capacities in strategic sectors that conventional economic organisations still insufficiently address. The flexibility of these models and their strong adaptability to each territory’s constraints allow them to identify challenges precisely and respond to them effectively.

Focus: PTCE Sud Aquitaine (Seignanx Employment Area Committee, France)

PTCE Sud Aquitaine operates in the Seignanx employment area in the south of the Landes department, a highly industrialised territory where employment has been declining since the 1970s. In the 2000s, local elected officials joined forces with economic, associative and public actors to create the PTCE, led and facilitated by the Seignanx Employment Area Committee.

Bringing together more than 200 businesses, work integration organisations, training providers and institutional actors, the hub has piloted territorial strategic workforce planning, which helps anticipate employment needs, support social and professional integration, and create tools for pooling resources and creating jobs (employer groups, business and employment cooperatives, etc.). Other projects then fostered the creation of new territorial value chains, including:

- **eco-housing**, addressing the transformation of the construction sector (bio-based or reused materials, sufficiency in the way we build and live), by bringing together construction firms, social landlords and public actors;
- the **territorial food project**, supporting local, sustainable food accessible to all: structuring short supply chains (plant proteins, market gardening, food aid), awareness-raising, diversification of agricultural production and facilitation of cooperation, strengthening the territory's food and economic resilience.

3.2. Creating sustainable jobs and developing skills

CSEI prioritise job creation and local economic development, in response to challenges of social integration, economic development and individual autonomy that rank among the most important in European societies[14]. They generally rely on proximity activities and support or equip local economic activities. Often linked to organisations that integrate vulnerable people or those far from employment, they help secure the career paths of local residents.

Cooperation also helps match labour supply and demand: the activities developed by CSEI build on local skills, often include training, connect career pathways and pool resources, for example through shared employment.

These activities create jobs that cannot be relocated and contribute to a more social Europe that supports quality jobs, education and skills, and fosters social and territorial cohesion by tackling unemployment through the integration of those furthest from the labour market. The resilience and competitiveness of European territories and businesses also depend on locally rooted productive activities, which require a trained and qualified local workforce: CSEI help develop it.

Focus: PTCE Le PÔPE, early childhood hub (Seine-Saint-Denis, France)

Founded in 2015 in Seine-Saint-Denis, Le PÔPE is a collective of associations that first responds to childcare needs in a territory where only 32% of needs are covered, compared with 58% in France as a whole and 75% in Paris. Bringing together childcare providers, work integration and training organisations, local authorities, solidarity funders, architects and sociologists, it expands childcare provision while removing barriers to parents' employment[15].

With a team of 4 employees, Le PÔPE facilitates a broad community of partners built on the commitment of a dozen founding organisations. Its diversified services give it a hybrid business model:

[14] GECES (2021), op. cit.
[15] RTES, "Déniché pour vous n° 118 – PTCE Le PôPE", March 2023, p. 1

- training in early childhood professions for work integration actors and local authorities;
- an incubator for childminder centres, which has created 22 facilities and more than 200 childcare places;
- career discovery activities for people in integration or retraining and for secondary school pupils;
- parenting support against non-take-up of services, support for families as private employers, and actions to remove barriers to employment (access to rights, language training);
- reuse projects for childcare equipment with resource centres in the Paris region, and a planned third place dedicated to training, awareness-raising and reuse.

3.3. Making territorial cooperation a driver of research and innovation

"Conventional" economic clusters generally rest on businesses' wish to come together to control costs and exploit complementarities within a sector ("spatial" and "organisational" proximity). The specificity of CSEI is that they arise from an "institutional proximity" between their members[16]: they share a common space of representations, models and rules applied to thinking and action, rooted in social economy values, which facilitates cooperation.

CSEI are experimentation spaces where businesses, work integration actors, institutions and researchers identify concrete problems, test solutions, and capitalise on and disseminate the knowledge drawn from these practices.

[16] Pérard, P., under the direction of Stokkink, D., Les clusters d'innovation sociale : analyse et bonnes pratiques européennes, Pour la Solidarité, "Notes d'analyse", June 2015

As facilitators and “catalysts” of their territory, CSEI therefore play a major research and innovation role. This ranges from foresight analysis of the territory and its needs to the design of new responses and of social, organisational and technological innovations addressing locally identified challenges.

Focus: SocCER, action research for renewable energy communities in Wallonia (Belgium)

Since 2021, the University of Mons has been running the SocCER project (socio-economics of renewable energy communities) in three Walloon municipalities: Verviers, Ans and Chapelle-lez-Herlaimont[17]. Funded by the Energy Department of the Public Service of Wallonia, it relies on living labs in which researchers support residents in setting up renewable energy communities (RECs), with a twofold aim: making citizens actors of the energy transition and market, and including all households, including the most vulnerable.

The university designs and disseminates educational tools and acts as an intermediary between citizens, institutions and the organisations involved. The research covers the acceptability of RECs, the influence of participatory approaches on acceptability and energy use, and the inclusiveness of RECs. Initial findings show that active participation makes the difference: without it, the community risks being just “a new supplier”, whereas strong participation increases control over the energy market and changes in energy use. A practical guide already sets out concrete recommendations for setting up an REC.

3.4. Accelerating the transition of territories

The GECES report presents CSEI as “perfect instruments” for aligning all the actors of a territory to contribute to the digital and sustainable transition of a local and proximity economy[18]. Through their multi-sector innovation approaches, CSEI have

[17] University of Mons, SocCER project

[18] GECES (2021), op. cit., p. 12.

direct effects on the social and ecological transitions of territories, but also on their economic, organisational and technological dimensions.

Cooperation between economic, institutional, research and citizen actors creates flexibility and proactiveness, and gives businesses access to more resources, ideas and knowledge. It thus facilitates the adoption of new development strategies and changes in practices and models. This flexibility, hard to achieve for an isolated actor, is necessary for the socio-ecological transition of territories, all the more so as this transition itself raises complex socio-economic challenges[19].

Taking part in a cluster also makes it possible to rethink the value of resources on a wider scale. Structuring value chains within a territory makes it possible to rethink their use and enhancement at meso-economic level. Economically, actors diversify their funding sources and rationalise production costs; ecologically, the articulation of their activities fosters a resource-efficient circular economy.

Focus: the Charleroi Métropole Food Belt (Belgium)

The Charleroi Métropole Food Belt (CACM) is a territorial facilitator active in the Charleroi area, a rural and semi-rural territory of some thirty municipalities. Since 2017, this collective of local actors has been working towards a local, sustainable and environmentally friendly food system, in a territory facing social and economic divides, agriculture geared towards animal feed and monocultures, and an ageing farming population. Its main projects:

- the **Carolostore** cooperative, a “market of local super-producers” bringing together more than a hundred Walloon producers and artisans in a short supply chain, at a fair price for producers;
- a 2,400 m² **short supply chain hub** under construction: shared vegetable processing unit and workshop, sales counter and logistics hub serving local authorities;

[19] GECES (2021), op. cit., p. 47.

- **support to local authorities** to facilitate local producers' access to public procurement (school canteens, collective catering);
- a **cooperative slaughterhouse** under construction, supporting farmers towards grass-fed and organic livestock farming.

The CACM also facilitates actors across the food chain, capitalises on and shares its experience, and advises public authorities, notably through a Food Policy Council bringing together food system actors and civil society.

3.5. Facilitating the territory and renewing local governance and citizen participation

CSEI bring together, at territorial level, actors whose models, approaches and objectives differ, and facilitate the cooperation that enables a collective response to local needs. Their governance models, based on social economy values, allow them to maintain a social and environmental ambition and a goal of fair and sustainable territorial development, while reconciling individual and collective interests.

Cooperation creates new forms of responsibility that extend beyond the boundaries of the firm. It brings out a shared vision of the needs of the territory and its residents, and turns this vision into projects: shared services, proximity services (mobility, shops), identification of market outlets, services that facilitate business activity or residents' daily lives. Far from hindering competitiveness, cooperation creates an ecosystem conducive to social cohesion and gives businesses access to human, organisational, financial or technological resources they would not have alone.

Most CSEI also include a citizen dimension in their governance, through the direct involvement of residents or of civil society organisations. According to the GECES, this strengthens the social ambition of projects. CSEI thus go beyond conventional local governance channels, often limited to consultation, which increases the legitimacy and ownership of projects. Based on social economy principles, they also spread these norms and values to actors outside the social economy, public authorities and traditional businesses alike.

Focus: PTCE Figeacteurs (Lot, France)

Set up in 2015 in south-western France, Figeacteurs first responded to the need for shared services among local businesses, creating in 2016 an inter-company nursery to attract talent, often young parents. The association then broadened its action and brought together many more members than its five founding organisations: a corporate concierge service from 2017, support for renewable energy projects, a work mobility lab, and in 2022 the creation of Figeac Écomobilité (long-term rental of electric bikes, inter-company car-sharing, mobility advisers, rental of electric micro-vehicles).

The Figeac area is one of the few rural employment areas in France creating high-quality industrial jobs, in mechanics and aeronautics[20]. Despite an unemployment rate of around 7%, it remains rural and isolated, and faces agricultural decline, an ageing workforce and recruitment difficulties. The lack of job opportunities for the partners of newly recruited employees weighs on its attractiveness: Figeacteurs therefore launched, with the regional economic development association ADEFPAT, a reflection on partners' employment involving businesses, temporary work agencies, chambers of commerce and local authorities.

Figeacteurs brings together social economy organisations, industrial firms, agricultural cooperatives and work integration enterprises with very different cultures. Its joint projects build mutual knowledge, trust and a real desire to "do together" what no single organisation "is legitimate to do alone": the PTCE acts as a territorial aggregator.

[20] Laboulais, F. and Kirchner, O., "Figeacteurs : un pôle territorial de coopération économique (PTCE) né du besoin d'une crèche interentreprises pour devenir agrégateur de territoire", Le Labo de l'ESS, November 2018

3.6. Strengthening social ties and solidarity

Unlike purely economic forms of cooperation, CSEI primarily seek responses to the social and ecological challenges of their territory. Faced with population ageing, social isolation, economic inequality, difficult access to services in rural areas or distrust of local democracy, they offer tailored responses based on a shared diagnosis and tackle social divides.

A large majority of CSEI rely on, or create, solidarity actions and support for inclusion and social and professional integration. These dynamics build support, training and integration pathways that enable vulnerable people to regain an active place in society, and reduce inequalities within the territory itself.

CSEI often rely on a physical place where collective initiatives take shape: third places, community cafés, solidarity grocery shops. These “places of connection”[21] create social ties, new forms of solidarity and a sense of belonging to the territory. Local governance, strengthened by the active participation of actors and citizens, gives everyone a place and the power to act, and thus strengthens trust in local and European democracy[22].

[21] Berhuet, S., Hoibian, S. and Paquet, N., Les « lieux du lien » : un levier pour les habitants des territoires ruraux, CRÉDOC, for the RTE Foundation and the French National Agency for Territorial Cohesion (ANCT), October 2026

[22] Delfavard, H. and Fontaine, G., “Construire les PTCE comme des communs sociaux : quel rôle pour les pouvoirs publics ?”, RECMA, 2018/3, no. 349, pp. 56-70, DOI: 10.3917/recma.349.0056.

Focus: PTCE Mon P’tit Camion (Brittany, France)

In rural areas, the gradual disappearance of shops and local services is not only a problem of access to goods and services: it also reduces opportunities for meeting, exchange and community life. In Brittany, PTCE Mon P’tit Camion addresses this challenge by developing and structuring mobile shops and services. By connecting local authorities, traders and residents, it fosters mobile solutions tailored to local needs, whether shops or cultural, administrative or health services.

Beyond their primary function, these mobile services become places of social interaction that help maintain a regular human presence in rural municipalities and strengthen the sense of belonging to the territory. The association also created the “Festitruck”, a festival that showcases the diversity of mobile services and brings together residents, elected officials, traders and associations. After almost ten editions, some attracting more than 3,000 people, the initiative has spread to other rural areas, including the Landes and Calvados departments. The festival is a starting point: conferences and collective work then address access to services, mobility or local economic development, and the association supports the cooperation dynamics that emerge.

IV. SEVEN RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE EU INSTITUTIONS

Each recommendation sets out our asks, the EU texts concerned and the institutions addressed.

4.1. Recognise and fund the territorial facilitation function

Territorial facilitation (mobilising and connecting local actors around a cooperative project) is what makes CSEI work. Without structured, long-term funding for it, cooperation does not develop, and its very real effects cannot be captured by short-term quantitative milestones.

Our asks

- Explicitly list the facilitation and coordination of territorial economic cooperation, including CSEI, among eligible types of intervention in the NRPP Regulation, the future ESF and the territorial strands of the ERDF.
- Allow multiannual funding of this function, not project-based funding only.
- Accept process milestones in the performance framework (ecosystem structuring, number of active cooperations, projects incubated, jobs created) alongside result indicators.

Target texts: NRPP Regulation, ESF Regulation, MFF 2028-2034 performance framework regulation.

Addressees: European Parliament (REGI, EMPL and BUDG committees), Council, DG REGIO and DG EMPL.

4.2. Recognise CSEI as generators of social innovation projects and safeguard multi-level governance

Through their project engineering and development function, CSEI generate social innovation. By bringing together public authorities, businesses, associations and citizens, they design, implement and scale out solutions to insufficiently met local needs, whether in employment, mobility, the green transition or access to services. This capacity to act relies on multi-level governance that enables territories to set their own priorities and support economic projects suited to local realities.

Our asks

- Secure substantial regional chapters in the NRPP Regulation, designed under the partnership principle with local authorities and social economy actors.
- Maintain integrated territorial instruments, modelled on Integrated Territorial Investments (ITI) and Community-Led Local Development (CLLD/LEADER), able to fund cross-cutting projects.
- Name territorial economic cooperation among the eligible beneficiaries of these instruments.
- Recognise and support CSEI as generators of social innovation projects, and support their engineering, experimentation and scaling-out functions.

Target texts: NRPP Regulation (regional chapters, partnership principle, multi-level governance).

Addressees: European Parliament (REGI committee), Council and Member States, DG REGIO, European Committee of the Regions.

4.3. Recognise the contribution of territorial cooperation to research and innovation

CSEI are experimentation spaces where businesses, researchers and institutions identify concrete problems and test solutions. As early as 2021, the GECES recommended integrating them into EU cluster policy.

Our asks

- Integrate CSEI into EU cluster policy: the European Cluster Collaboration Platform (ECCP), the “Clusters meet Regions” workshops, Euroclusters and the future European Competitiveness Fund.
- In FP10 (2028-2034), open calls explicitly dedicated to action research, participatory research and place-based social innovation, alongside fundamental research.
- Ensure continuity between ongoing Horizon Europe projects and FP10 for research-territory partnerships.

Target texts: FP10 Regulation proposal, European Competitiveness Fund Regulation.

Addressees: European Parliament (ITRE committee), DG RTD, DG GROW, EISMEA.

4.4. Recognise the role of CSEI in the green transition and territorial resilience

Circular economy, sustainable food, community energy, shared mobility: CSEI build local value chains that turn EU transition and resilience goals into practice.

Our asks

- Recognise territorial cooperation as an implementing actor of the forthcoming Circular Economy Act, especially for reuse, repair and preparing for reuse.
- Make the climate and environment strands of the NRPPs accessible to local cooperative projects (territorial food systems, renewable energy communities, shared mobility).
- Highlight these cooperations in just transition instruments.

Target texts: Circular Economy Act (expected by the end of 2026), NRPP Regulation (climate and environment objectives).

Addressees: European Parliament (ENVI committee), DG ENV, DG ENER, DG REGIO.

4.5. Support the development of territorial financing tools

Territorial cooperation mobilises local finance in many forms (citizen savings, community foundations, endowment funds, pooled treasury tools) that root projects locally and fund innovation.

Our asks

- Include these territorial financing tools in the EU toolkit for regional and local social economy policies announced by the Commission.
- In the announced clarification of State aid rules, clarify the treatment of public funding for territorial facilitation and for local services delivered by the social economy.
- Open future ESF loans for the social economy and EU guarantees to these local financing vehicles.

Target texts: follow-up to the 2026 Social Economy Action Plan review, State aid framework, ESF Regulation.

Addressees: DG EMPL, DG COMP, European Parliament (EMPL and ECON committees).

4.6. Involve CSEI in co-designing public policies at all levels

By bringing together local authorities, businesses, associations and citizens, CSEI renew the way local public action is designed and break down policy silos. This expertise should inform EU policies.

Our asks

- Recognise CSEI as stakeholders under the partnership principle in the preparation, monitoring and evaluation of NRPPs, including monitoring committees.
- Relaunch the European Social Economy Regions (ESER) network and involve territorial cooperation initiatives.
- Capitalise on and disseminate CSEI practices through the Social Economy Gateway and the ECCP.

Target texts: NRPP Regulation (partnership principle), implementation of the Social Economy Action Plan.

Addressees: DG REGIO, DG EMPL, European Committee of the Regions, Member States.

4.7. Build a cross-cutting EU policy to support territorial cooperation

Rooted locally, territorial cooperation addresses interconnected issues: competitiveness, cohesion, employment, food, research. Since the social economy unit of DG GROW was dissolved on 1 May 2025, the link between the social economy and industrial policy has weakened[23].

Our asks

- Set up an inter-DG working group (EMPL, GROW, REGIO, AGRI, ENV, RTD) on territorial economic cooperation, linked to the preparation of the Right to Stay strategy.
- Make the eligibility of territorial cooperation explicit in future EU regulations and in the NRPPs.
- Preserve, as far as possible, the territorial delivery of structural funds.

Target texts: Right to Stay strategy (early 2027), MFF 2028-2034 regulations.

Addressees: Commission Secretariat-General, Executive Vice-Presidents in charge of cohesion and social rights, European Parliament.

[23] Pioneers Post, 1 April 2026, op. cit.; the Social Economy Action Plan is now led by the Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (DG EMPL).

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POUR LA SOLIDARITÉ-PLS is mobilizing to defend and consolidate the European social model, a subtle balance between economic development and social justice. The POUR LA SOLIDARITÉ-PLS multicultural and multidisciplinary team works in the public arena alongside companies, public authorities and civil society organizations, under the motto

Understand, Connect
et Support in order to Act !

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POUR LA SOLIDARITÉ-PLS conducts research and analysis to raise awareness of societal issues, offer new perspectives for reflection and make European policies more accessible.

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