

NEWS LETTER

PARI – Paths for rural innovation: implementing Clusters for Social and Ecological Innovation (CSEIs) to improve quality of life in rural areas

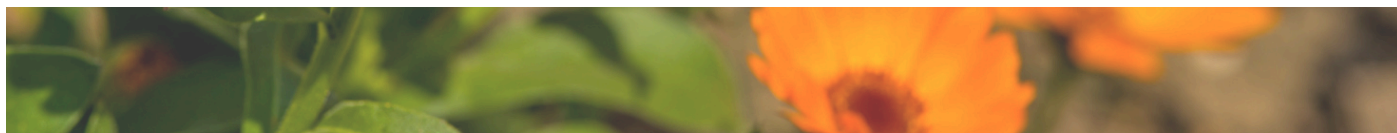
Looking Back, Looking Ahead...

In recent months, the PARI project has advanced significantly, gathering the project partners and some key stakeholders in the Capacity Building workshop and the visit to the Ceinture Alimentaire of Charleroi-Métropole, at the end of January 2025. In addition to providing insightful information, these experiences have deepened and anchored our understanding of the practical implications of context-specific innovation.

Local culture, historical legacy, and territorial dynamics have a profound impact on the formation of CSEIs, as demonstrated by the encounters thus far, which vary in site, actors and focus. Every visit is meant to offer a different perspective on how the residents and workers in a community co-create its ecosystems.

During the workshop interactions and the practical learning in the field, we have already witnessed how place-based identities, institutional frameworks, and community-led efforts come together to provide creative, resilient and innovative solutions.

In this second issue of the PARI newsletter, we take a closer look at the **key takeaways from the mission to Torres Vedras (Portugal)**. It highlights the main outcomes of this visit, the reflections they sparked, and the messages they bring to the ongoing analysis of Clusters for Social and Ecological Innovation (CSEIs) within the project. As we move forward, these insights are helping us better understand the key features, enabling conditions, and challenges that define CSEIs and the related socially and ecologically grounded territorial innovation.



The PARI's objectives in a nutshell

The **PARI – PATHS for Rural Innovation project** is a two-year action that is supported by the European Commission in the framework of the Single Market Programme (SMP). Started in September 2024, PARI intends to facilitate the setup or the consolidation in rural areas of a specific sort of clusters, named **Clusters of Social and Ecological Innovation (CSEIs)**. *Clusters* are experiences of convergence of resources from different sources, aimed at pursuing objectives that could not be achieved by individual actors with the same success. *Clusters* may have different natures: industrial clusters, territorial clusters, economic clusters, sectoral clusters. **CSEIs**, in turn, represent a special case...

CSEIs, as they go beyond sectors or silo approaches, and aim at gathering resources of different nature to improve the systemic capacity to respond to social and environmental challenges through targeted innovation paths.

Consistently, **the PARI project aims at identifying and implementing pathways to accelerate the creation of CSEIs in rural areas, through the improvement of capacities and operational frameworks for social economy actors, in partnership with local authorities, entrepreneurial actors and other players, in the partner territories.**

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The Mission to Torres Vedras



Location : Torres Vedras (Portugal)

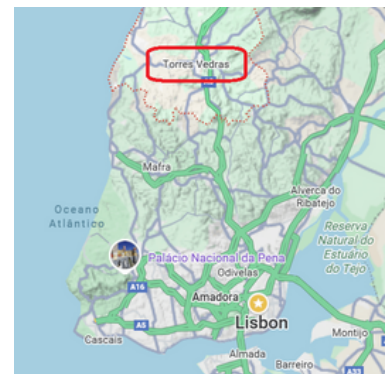
Duration : 25-27 March, 2025

Focus Areas : How social and ecological innovation can be harnessed to foster community resilience and improve quality of life. The experience was structured to highlight a rich ecosystem of initiatives that merge sustainability, culture, technology and community empowerment.

The interplay of place-based and socio-economic conditions that shape local strategic planning

Torres Vedras is a medium-sized city of approximately 83.000 inhabitants, located in the Lisbon District, West Region. This region maintains a strong functional and economic connection with the Lisbon metropolitan area, with its proximity to the capital playing a key strategic role in territorial dynamics.

This closeness is further reinforced by the presence of major transport infrastructures that ensure direct and efficient access to Lisbon. Within this regional context, Caldas da Rainha in the north, and Torres Vedras in the south, emerge as two primary urban centres with specific territorial advantages. Both cities show a notable capacity to attract businesses, drive economic revitalisation and support the rehabilitation of historic areas and neighbourhoods facing decline.



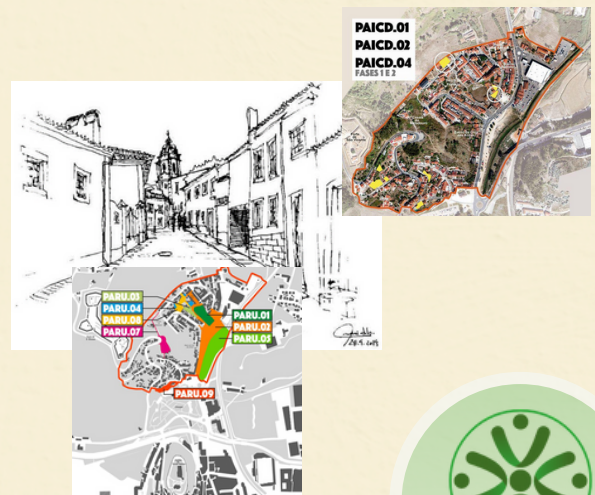
In particular, Torres Vedras stands out as a predominantly **rural municipality**, where agriculture and forestry shape not only the landscape but also the socio-economic fabric of the territory. Together, these land uses cover over 35,000 hectares (roughly 87.6% of the municipality's total area), while areas designated for social use account for just under 11%, with 4,473 hectares.

In strategic terms, the municipality has developed a comprehensive **urban development plan (Plano Estratégico de Desenvolvimento Urbano – PEDU)**, which outlines a set of integrated interventions aimed at enhancing territorial cohesion, social wellbeing, environmental sustainability and local competitiveness. The PEDU is structured around three core action plans: the Sustainable Urban Mobility Action Plan (**PAMUS**), the Urban Regeneration Action Plan (**PARU**), and the Integrated Action Plan for Disadvantaged Communities (**PAIC**).

Indeed, an **inspiring example of how integrated policy thinking can effectively guide local development pathways!**

The strategic framework guiding these plans is built around **five key axes:**

1. the promotion of **territorial cohesion**, with a strong emphasis on addressing existing spatial imbalances across different parts of the city
2. the reinforcement of **social cohesion**, through the creation of spaces that encourage community interaction and the improvement of access to social infrastructure and services
3. **environmental sustainability**, through the development of soft mobility networks (e.g., pedestrian pathways, cycling infrastructure, and public transport) alongside energy-efficient systems and the expansion of green spaces
4. the city's **economic visibility and competitiveness**, positioning Torres Vedras as a dynamic and attractive urban centre
5. the pursuit of **good governance and transparent communication with local communities**, encouraging collaboration across sectors, shared responsibility, and the active involvement of a wide range of stakeholders.





Exploring some of the key stakeholders of the local ecosystem

At the heart of the visit in Torres Vedras there was the **Encosta Programme**, an urban regeneration project led by the municipality that transforms underutilized spaces in the Encosta de São Vicente area into vibrant, inclusive environments.

Closely linked to this was the introduction to **Oeste Respira**, a social innovation incubator that supports the development of initiatives aimed at enhancing mental health and overall well-being. This space provides ground for pioneering social enterprises and community-centered solutions.

Participants also engaged with several other initiatives through **concise presentations**.

Somos Comunidade emerged as a model of public-civic partnership, developed collaboratively by the city council and local associations to foster social cohesion. **Porta do Bairro** introduced a concept of a community house open to all residents, designed to nurture a sense of belonging through shared spaces and activities. Cultural innovation was also central to the dialogue, as seen in **A Bolha**, a puppetry company emphasizing the expressive power of puppets alongside visible actors, and **AREPO**, which is democratizing opera by making it more accessible and integrated into community life.



The relationship between local agriculture and education was another key focus. At the **Henriques Nogueira Secondary School**, participants learned how meals served to students are sourced directly from local producers, reinforcing the value of local supply chains. This initiative is part of the broader School Food Sustainability Programme (PSAE), which integrates nutritional, environmental, social, and economic principles to improve student health while supporting local farmers and fostering civic responsibility.



Creativity and art were celebrated through a visit to **RAMA**, an artistic residency programme that brings together artists, researchers, and curators from across Portugal and beyond. RAMA supports interdisciplinary collaboration, encourages dialogue between contemporary practices and traditional knowledge, and strengthens ties between cultural actors and the local community.

Innovation in agriculture was further explored at **Smart Farm Colab**, a collaborative laboratory dedicated to the digital transformation of the agricultural sector. The lab develops advanced technological solutions to improve efficiency and sustainability in horticulture, fruticulture and viticulture, ensuring agriculture remains both productive and ecologically responsible.

The exploration culminated with a visit to the **Adega Cooperativa da Carvoeira**, a historic winery known for its blend of tradition and innovation. Here, participants discovered how a cooperative model can support both quality production and regional identity through sustainable practices and cutting-edge technology.

Throughout the experience, participants were consistently invited to **reflect on how social economy initiatives can shape more inclusive, sustainable communities. From artistic expression to technological advancement, and from food systems to urban regeneration**, the contents shared offered an overview of a territory deeply invested in innovation with purpose.



What's next?

- The transnational mission to Östergötland Region (Sweden), on 5-6 September 2025
- The finalisation of the research & analysis of CSEIs experiences in the partner territories
- Clustering activities with other SMP projects
- Local meetings and workshops with key stakeholders in Navarra, Östergötland and Torres Vedras... *Check with your local partners!*



<https://www.revesnetwork.eu/project/pari/>



The PARI project Consortium

The PARI project is coordinated by **REVES - the European Network of Cities and Regions for the Social Economy**, and is collaborative carried out by a consortium of six other partners:



Diesis Network (Belgium), **Region Östergötland** and **Coompanion Östergötland** (Sweden), **Gobierno de Navarra** and **ANEL** (Spain), and **Câmara Municipal de Torres Vedras** (Portugal).

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