



# PARI – A Rural Innovation Lab in Saône-et-Loire, France

*Experimenting with methods before solutions*



# Why Create a Rural Innovation Lab?

## Mobility

Access to healthcare, employment and social participation remains a daily challenge.

## Housing & Services

Rural communities face gaps in affordable housing and essential public services.

## Agriculture & Heritage

Local economies and cultural landscapes need practical, affordable support.

## Limited Resources

Rural territories often lack the financial and engineering capacity to respond alone.

✓ Rural innovation must be **useful, accessible and adapted** to local needs.



# PARI: An Experiment in Itself

## What is PARI?

Created in 2024 by the French State at departmental level in Saône-et-Loire.

Unlike many innovation programmes, PARI operates with very limited dedicated resources and one project manager.

How was it built ?

The laboratory was not designed from a predefined model. It has been built progressively through experimentation, learning and adaptation — making PARI itself an experiment.



# Three Levels of Experimentation

**PARI does not experiment on a single level. It explores innovation across three distinct, interconnected dimensions.**



## **Experimenting with Solutions**

**Mobility, housing, agriculture and heritage.**




## **Experimenting with Methods**

**How can rural needs be identified differently and more effectively?**



## **Experimenting with a Laboratory**

**How can a rural innovation lab be created without a predefined model?**

 **Key insight: Methods can be as valuable as solutions.**



# Case Study 1: Rural Mobility in Brionnais Sud Bourgogne



## Field Immersion

Interviews, surveys and direct engagement with local residents and stakeholders.



## Co-Design & Analysis

Collaborative workshops to map needs and identify practical responses.



## Current Work

Needs assessment completed. Solution design phase under preparation.

The most valuable result may not be the mobility service itself, but the method used to identify needs.

# Case Study 2 : Building a Rural Food Solidarity Initiative

Following a PARI seminar, the French Red Cross launched an initiative to connect local agriculture and food solidarity within the **Bresse Territorial Food Project** — creating a joined-up ecosystem that brings fresh, local produce directly to vulnerable rural residents.

## Consortium Mobilised

- French Red Cross
- Chamber of Agriculture
- MSA
- SOLAAL
- Food Bank
- Pré Vert Social Enterprise
- Bresse Territorial Food Project

→ Developed within the Bresse Territorial Food Project and supported through public funding opportunities.

## Expected Benefits for Rural Communities

- Better access to quality local food
- Stronger local food systems
- Reduced mobility barriers
- Support for vulnerable households



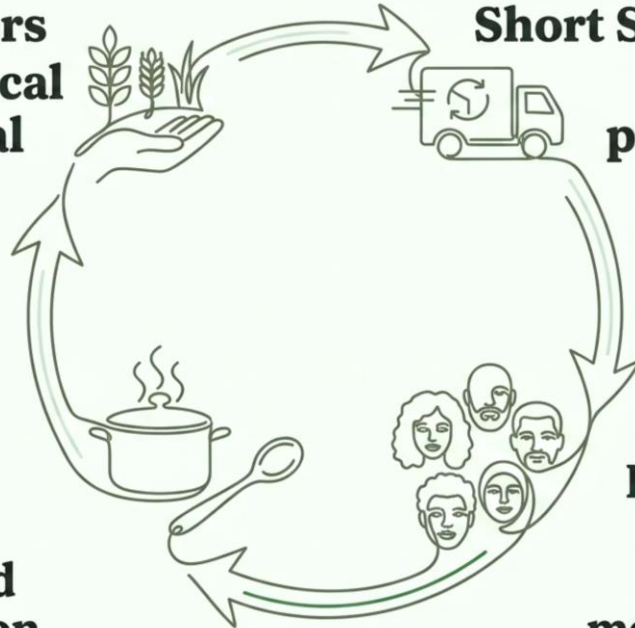
# Case Study 2 : Building a Rural Food Solidarity Initiative

**Local Farmers**  
Supplying local agricultural products.

**Short Supply Chains**  
Connecting producers and distribution channels.

**Culinary Mediation**  
Supporting healthy eating practices and food education.

**Beneficiaries**  
Rural residents facing food insecurity and mobility barriers.



✔ **PARI Contribution:** Facilitating partnerships, coordinating stakeholders, supporting project design, helping mobilise funding opportunities, and creating a transferable model that can be replicated across other rural territories.

# What is PARI Producing?

## A Reusable and Transferable Toolbox

PARI aims to produce practical methods, replicable tools and low-cost approaches that foster greater local autonomy.

The mobility survey and analysis framework can already be reused by other rural municipalities — without relying on expensive consultancy services.

- ✓ Rural communities should not always depend on external expertise to understand their own needs.



## Practical Methods

**Field-tested approaches ready to apply.**



## Replicable Tools

**Frameworks adaptable to other territories.**



## Low-Cost Approaches

**Designed for constrained rural budgets.**



## New partnerships

# Lessons Learned After Two Years

1

## No Standardised Solutions

Rural areas have distinct realities. One-size-fits-all approaches rarely work.

2

## Small-Scale Reduces Risk

Testing at small scale allows learning without large financial exposure.

3

## Innovation Starts with Listening

Deep engagement with communities reveals needs that surveys alone cannot capture.

4

## Constraints Foster Creativity

Limited resources push teams to find smarter, more efficient solutions.



**Frugality can be a driver of innovation.**

# Looking Ahead

## Continue Learning

Deepen experiments in mobility, housing, agriculture and heritage across Saône-et-Loire.

## Grow the Toolbox

Develop a growing library of methods that rural communities can use independently.

## Build Autonomy

Help rural territories identify their own needs and design targeted, locally-owned responses.

Rural territories are often seen as places with fewer resources. We see them as places that can innovate differently.



# Thank You

**Our ambition is not only to test solutions. It is also to build a toolbox that helps rural communities become more autonomous in identifying needs and designing responses.**

Justine Watremez - Rural Policy Officer

PARI – Rural Innovation Lab

Préfecture de Saône-et-Loire, France

Rural Pact Policy Lab

Brussels · 2026

