

social innovation mission facility

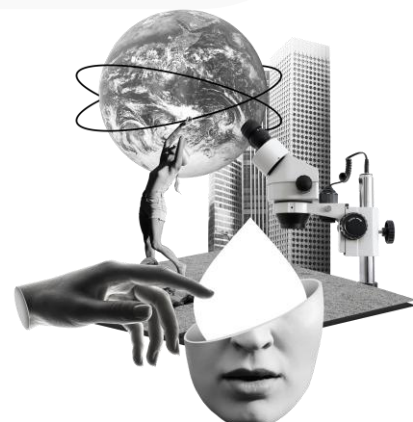
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CATALOGUE OF IMPACT PATHWAYS OF SIS IN SUPPORT OF THE EU MISSIONS

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Executive summary

This catalogue explores and makes visible the ways in which social innovation (SI) contributes to the current five EU Missions and to mission-oriented innovation policy (MOIP) more broadly. It does so through two analyses. It examines how SI is currently embedded within the Missions programming cycle and draws on emerging insights to suggest how it can be more strongly integrated to fully leverage its transformative potential. It also traces how SIs — characterised by new practices, social relations, organisational forms, and institutional arrangements that address societal challenges in new ways — contribute to Mission objectives and goals via their actual or potential outcomes in society, in what we refer to as SI impact pathways.

Key findings

What is the current state of integration of SI across EU Missions and how can this be done more effectively?

It is found that SI is unevenly included across different stages of the cycle (including programming, project selection, implementation, and monitoring, learning, and evaluation), and across the five Missions.

Within the programming stage, a key way in which SI is included in Mission activities is through explicit tagging of topics as calling for SI. However, analysis of various projects with socially innovative aspects reveals that **SI-tagging is neither necessary nor sufficient on its own to stimulate SI in EU-Mission-funded projects**. Leveraging SI potential requires a coupling of the SI-tagging of topics with a supportive implementation structure. The implementation architecture in the Cities Mission — characterised by a substantively funded implementation platform which supports SI embedding in cities' activities — emerges as a heretofore good example.

Across the programming cycle and across the five Missions, SI appears to be embedded largely in activities where there is an explicit need for stimulating engagement and/or collaboration among diverse actors. While crucial, since a core objective of the Missions is to mobilise diverse actors to respond to societal challenges, this focus underleverages SI's transformative role in other impact domains, including the socio-material (how society relates to its natural and built environment) and socio-economic (how society relates to systems of production, consumption, exchange, and value creation) domains. For instance, in the form of new ways of planning and redesigning cities and regions toward climate neutrality and resilience, or in the form of new business models that value ecosystem services. Furthermore, Cascade funding — that enables smaller-scale actors to access funding for activities, which in some instances stimulates grassroots innovation — appears to be a strong enabling condition for SI embedding across several Missions. Actions

seeking to enhance the implementation of SI could therefore consider such funding instruments.

Based on emerging insights on how SI is currently embedded in the EU Missions, the following key suggestions are highlighted as useful for further integrating SI across the Missions programming cycle.

a) Programming and project selection

- Embed SI and the societal dimension across EU Missions and the future 10th Framework Programme (FP10) programming, from challenge definition through project selection.
- Future work programmes should value depth of systemic transformation in local contexts alongside transnational reach.
- Broaden the understanding of SI beyond stakeholder engagement to include new ways of doing, and thinking that drive systemic change.

b) Implementation mechanisms

- Develop long-term, connected funding and collaboration ecosystems to sustain and scale socially innovative solutions beyond individual projects.
- Strengthen mechanisms for engaging a broader range of actors, including civil society, industry, and other funding partners. The SIs showcased in the impact pathways (Chapter 3) present relevant examples, such as Local Green Deals that unite public and private sector in climate neutral action and Territorial Management Agreements which are used as a tool to establish agreement amongst the quadruple helix on regional strategies concerning soil health management.

c) Monitoring and learning

- Develop monitoring frameworks that link short-term project outputs to longer-term societal and systemic impacts.
- Reduce structural barriers to collaboration by supporting joint learning, shared monitoring frameworks and knowledge exchange across projects.

What are the impact pathways through which SIs contribute to the EU Missions?

The constructed SI impact pathways (SIIPs) illustrate how multiple SIs in EU-Mission-funded as well as alternatively funded projects contribute to the objectives of the five Missions across three impact domains. Nine key types of pathways through SI contributes to Mission objectives are identified. Each pathway type represents a distinct area in which SI triggers change:

- ***Governance and institutional domain:*** actor engagement and governance processes; knowledge co-production; monitoring and assessment; awareness and behavioural change.

- **Socio-economic domain:** business models and financing mechanisms; service ecosystems; livelihood and wellbeing.
- **Socio-material domain:** planning of cities and regions, (re)structuring the built and natural environment.

For policymakers, funders, social innovators, business support organisations and SI support organisations, the pathways offer a map of which SIs are currently harnessed in a given Mission area, which carry potential but remain underused, and where investment in SI might therefore be directed.

The SIIPs also revealed that the extent to which SI contributes to a Mission objective is shaped by how the objective is framed, with stronger contributions to objectives that have an explicit social dimension and weaker contributions to those primarily structured to elicit scientific knowledge and evidence. Consistent with the findings on SI integration in the Missions, the SIIPs further showed that EU-Mission-funded projects primarily focus their SI efforts on innovating governance arrangements, particularly actor engagement and governance processes, which creates opportunities to activate other pathway types. They also demonstrated that EU-Mission-funded projects emphasise broad-scale integration across actors and systems, whereas alternatively funded projects focus more deeply on individual systems, highlighting an opportunity to reflect on the balance between the breadth and depth of interventions aimed at transformative change.

Implications for MOIP

Findings on the contribution of SI to the five EU Missions also provide insights into its broader role in MOIP. SI's notable contribution to initiating new and reshaping existing governance and institutional arrangements in domains such as mobility, food, and healthcare indicates its crucial role in any mission with transformative intent. Achieving such missions is often contingent on reshaping governance and institutional arrangements, including by mobilising actors in the quadruple helix, a task for which technological innovation is not suited on its own. The report also illustrates SI contributions to reshaping socio-material relations and socio-economic arrangements, which are equally central to the transformative change pursued in missions.

Key takeaways and implications for research and innovation policy

1. Integrate social innovation into the strategic programming of Missions. Social innovation should be considered when Mission challenges, objectives and expected outcomes are defined, rather than being introduced only during project implementation. Mission programming should assess not only which technological developments are required, but also which changes in practices, social relations, organisational forms and institutional arrangements are necessary to achieve the intended transformation. Earlier integration would reduce the risk of social innovation being used primarily to facilitate the uptake or acceptance of predesigned technological solutions.

2. Use the social innovation impact pathways (SIIPs) as a programming and portfolio-management framework. The identified social innovation impact pathways can support the design, implementation and review of Mission portfolios. Programme designers can use them to identify which forms of societal change are required for particular Mission objectives, assess whether these pathways are adequately represented across call topics, funded projects and identify areas that remain underused. The pathways can also provide a common framework for formulating calls, assessing portfolio contributions, structuring monitoring activities and supporting learning across projects and Missions.

3. Extend the scope of social innovation beyond participation and co-creation. Mission programmes should continue to support participatory governance, actor engagement and knowledge co-production, but should not treat these as the full extent of social innovation. Calls and programmes should also enable social innovations that reshape socio-economic and socio-material systems, including new business and financing models, service ecosystems, livelihood arrangements, planning practices, land-use models and relationships with the built and natural environment. Explicitly recognising these contributions would enable Missions to address a broader range of conditions underlying transformative change.

4. Refer to social innovation explicitly in calls, project selection and monitoring. While explicit tagging of SI does not always directly result in its uptake in mission activities, it increases its chances as project proposals are shaped by topic and call texts. Where relevant, work programmes and calls should connect social innovation explicitly to Mission objectives, expected outcomes and impacts. Evaluation criteria should assess the credibility of proposed social innovation pathways, and evaluation panels should include appropriate SSH and social innovation expertise. Monitoring frameworks should subsequently capture changes in practices, relationships, organisational arrangements and institutions, rather than focusing only on technological outputs or participation figures.

5. Provide appropriate conditions for experimentation, implementation and amplification. Social innovations require time, resources and regulatory space to be developed, tested and adapted within specific contexts. Mission programmes should therefore provide suitable implementation mechanisms, such as pilot projects, testbeds, regulatory experimentation, flexible grants and cascade funding. They should also support the adaptation, replication and amplification of promising approaches, including connections to relevant public authorities, intermediaries, investors and alternative sources of blended finance instruments that contribute to moving from experimentation to institutionalisation. These mechanisms should preserve sufficient flexibility for local and sectoral actors while maintaining alignment with broader Mission objectives.

Why this matters now

Understanding and leveraging the role of SI in advancing the EU Missions and MOIP more broadly is important at this particular point in time for two reasons. First, the persistent urgency to address grand societal challenges such as climate change and biodiversity loss, whose adverse impacts on the planet may be irreversible if they go unattended, and which require transformations in the social as well as the technological domains. Second, the current de-prioritisation of social dimensions in dominant policy framings of these challenges, in favour of technical and technological solutions. Against this backdrop, the catalogue illustrates the role of SI in addressing the goals set out in the EU Missions, as well as broader societal challenges that may be enshrined in future MOIP.

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Abbreviation List

EC	European Commission
EU	European Union
CCA	Climate Change Adaptation
MOIP	Mission-Oriented Innovation Policy
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
R&D	Research and Development
R&I	Research and Innovation
SI	Social Innovation
SIIP	Social Innovation Impact Pathway
SIMF	Social-Innovation-Mission-Facility
WP	Work Programme

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1. INTRODUCTION

Mission-oriented innovation policy (MOIP) has emerged in Europe and other world regions as a dominant response to “grand societal challenges” (Janssen et al., 2021; Mazzucato & European Commission, 2018). These are wicked problems, such as climate change and biodiversity loss, that pose adverse consequences for the well-being of people and nature globally, yet are characterized by stakeholder contestations over their precise definition (e.g., their causes and potential impacts), feasible solutions, and the allocation of responsibility for addressing them (Edler et al., 2024; Wanzenböck et al., 2020). A MOIP approach involves formulating societal goals that define desired outcomes in addressing wicked problems and using these goals as a starting point for mobilising public and private resources related to research, innovation, and investment (European Commission, 2021a).

The Horizon Europe Missions illustrate Europe’s adoption of the MOIP approach. The five Missions¹ define targets for 2030 related to climate change adaptation (CCA), cancer prevention and treatment, climate-neutral and smart cities, healthy soils, and healthy oceans and inland waters. The challenges addressed by these Missions are not merely scientific or technological problems, but systemic challenges rooted in the organisation of economies, politics, and social life (European Commission & Geels, 2020; Schot & Steinmueller, 2018). Addressing them calls for deep transformations of societal systems such as food, energy, mobility, and healthcare to more socially, economically, and environmentally sustainable configurations. Doing so requires not only technological solutions, but social, institutional and behavioural changes as well. These non-technological aspects are embodied in the concept of social innovation (SI).

Social innovations encompass new practices, social relations, forms of organisation, and institutional arrangements to address societal challenges in new ways (Avelino et al., 2019; Howaldt & Schwarz, 2010; Wittmayer et al., 2022). This definition is based on an understanding of SI as practices that involve new ways of doing, thinking and/or organising in society (Avelino et al., 2019; Wittmayer et al., 2022). In relation to societal challenges, these novel practices are considered to be more effective than existing approaches (Howaldt et al., 2016; Schuch, 2024). An illustrative example is car sharing which entails access to a car without needing to own it. This increasingly popular shared mobility service is innovative, among others, in the way it reduces private car ownership and use with potentially cascading environmental effects related to reduced carbon dioxide emissions and reduced resource use from lower car production volumes (Wittmayer et al., 2023). This practice also bears transformative capacity by contributing to the disruption of established systems and norms around private car ownership as the dominant mode of mobility. The transformative potential of such SIs makes them crucial to advancing the EU Missions, and MOIP more broadly (Edler et al., 2024; Schot & Steinmueller, 2018; Schuch, 2024).

¹ When referring to the current five EU Missions, ‘Mission’ is capitalised to distinguish them from missions in general.

Despite recognition of SI within EU policy discourse (Bureau of European Policy Advisers et al., 2011; European Commission, 2023), the architecture of many missions (conceptual foundations, work programmes, governance arrangements) often remains skewed towards techno-scientific interventions and conventional research and development (R&D) instruments (Edler et al., 2024; Schuch, 2024). Marginalising SI – which is instrumental to shifting societal norms and practices – contributes to the persistent gap between the transformative intent of MOIP and its routine implementation (Edler et al., 2024; Larrue, 2021). By marginalising SI, MOIPs miss the opportunity to stimulate the changes in behaviours or practices, in forms of organisations and institutional arrangements, that are needed for missions to become transformative. One reason for SI marginalisation likely relates to a limited grasp of their empowering and transformative potentials (Avelino et al., 2019; Edler et al., 2024). Unlike their technological counterparts, the impacts of SIs are often more difficult to attribute, measure, and communicate (Antadze & Westley, 2012; Hietschold et al., 2023). This report addresses this challenge. It explores the ways through which SI is integrated in the EU Missions and also the ways through which SIs contribute to the goals postulated under the Missions through what are referred to as SI impact pathways (SIIPs). The following questions are asked and answered: 1) ***What is the current state of integration of SI across EU Missions and how can this be done more effectively?*** 2) ***What are the impact pathways through which SIs contribute to the EU Missions?*** Furthermore, it discusses SI impact pathways in relation to missions in general, beyond the five EU Missions.

To develop the SIIPs, we used a qualitative research design including literature review, database review (CORDIS, SIM, SI-DRIVE, TRANSIT, SONNET) complemented by a survey sent to SIMF (Social Innovation in Missions Facility) project partners identifying additional inspiring SIs, 20 expert interviews and a stakeholder workshop — the latter two with stakeholders involved in shaping, coordinating, and implementing the Missions. For an overview see Figure 1 and for a detailed elaboration of the research approach, see a separately published Appendix to this report² (see Namaganda et al., 2026).

² See find the methodology appendix here: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21704931>

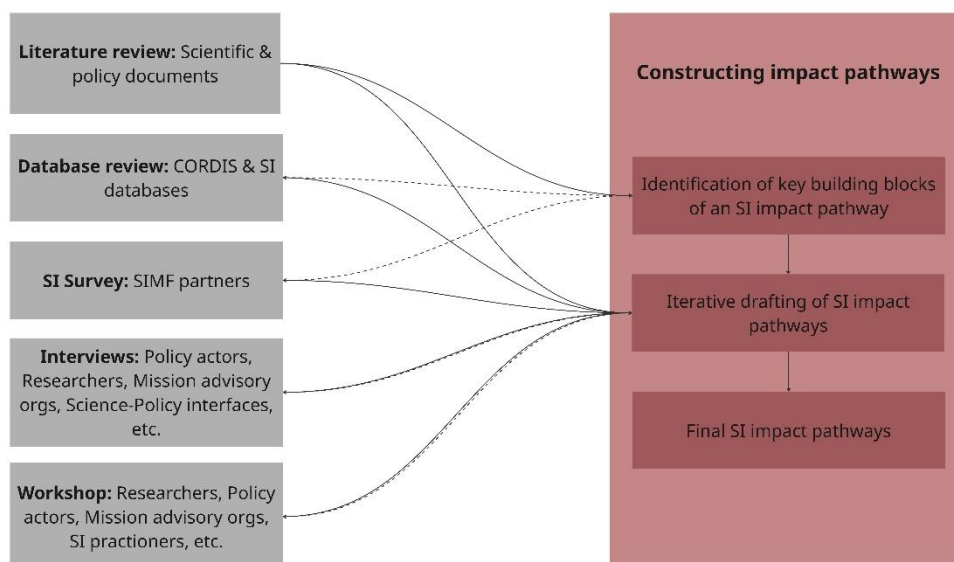


FIGURE 1: ILLUSTRATION OF WORKFLOW FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF SI IMPACT PATHWAYS (OWN ELABORATION)

The SIIPs presented in this report are insightful for actors seeking to understand how SIs are operationalised in the EU Missions, how they potentially contribute to Mission objectives and goals, and what their current contribution implies for the role of SI in broader MOIP, beyond the EU’s current Missions. The report does not aim to be exhaustive of all possible SIs whether in EU-Mission-funded or alternatively funded projects but rather represents a starting point. It bears insights for policymakers involved in shaping and implementing the EU’s MOIP, as well as researchers and practitioners engaged in MOIP and/or in SI. The report is structured as follows. Chapter 2 below focuses on how SI is integrated across the EU Missions and how it could be further and more effectively integrated in Mission architecture. Chapter 3 introduces the SIIPs for each of the five EU Missions, basing on these insights to explore how SI contributes to advancing the Missions. The report ends with Chapter 4 which presents a synthesis of the report’s key insights on the positioning of SI in relation to the EU Missions and broader MOIP.

2. SOCIAL INNOVATION IN THE EU MISSIONS

Understanding how SI is integrated across different stages of the EU Missions programming cycle provides a foundation for examining how its embedding contributes to advancing Mission goals. This section focuses on how SI is currently integrated within the EU Missions (2.1) as well as how it can be further embedded in ways that strengthen its impact (2.2). Its insights are based on a database review of EU-Mission-funded projects and stakeholder engagement in interviews and a workshop.

2.1. SI INCLUSION ACROSS THE MISSIONS PROGRAMMING CYCLE

The Missions programming cycle can be broadly categorised under four stages including programming, project selection, implementation, and monitoring, evaluation, and policy learning (European Commission, 2023a; European Commission, 2025; European Commission, n.d.; Foulds & Houston, 2026).

- **Strategic programming:** the strategic planning stage in which the EU policy priorities are translated into the strategic orientations, expected impacts and priorities that guide the Missions and their Work Programmes (WPs). The WPs then operationalise these priorities through destinations, calls and topics, specifying budgets and expected outcomes (see for example European Commission, 2025). This stage defines the research and innovation (R&I) activities supported by the EU.
- **Project selection:** the process through which calls for proposals are published, applications are submitted and evaluated, and projects are selected for funding, shaping the portfolio of actions contributing to Mission objectives (Foulds & Houston, 2026).
- **Implementation:** the execution by beneficiaries of the portfolio of funded projects per Mission (European Commission, n.d.).
- **Monitoring, evaluation and learning:** the reporting, monitoring, and evaluation of project and programme implementation and use of evaluation evidence to inform programme improvement and future policy design (see e.g., European Commission, 2023a).

The inclusion of SI across these four stages is examined based on 1) a review of the descriptions of the texts of Missions WP for the explicit mentioning of SI, 2) a review of EU-Mission-funded projects for their inclusion of socially innovative aspects, and 3) interviews with EU policy and other relevant actors on how SI is included across the four stages and in relation to the five Missions.

2.1.1. SI INCLUSION IN THE PROGRAMMING STAGE

The descriptions of the WPs and their constituent funding topic and call texts provide an indication of the activities funded by the EU towards the Missions. We examined how often SI has been explicitly mentioned in the descriptions of the Missions WP topics for the time period 2021-2027 to grasp the extent to which attention has been paid to SI by the five EU Missions³ in the programming phase (European Commission, 2021b; 2022; 2024a; 2025). Tables 1 and 2 present results.

TABLE 1: FREQUENCY OF EXPLICIT SI REFERENCING IN WP TOPIC DESCRIPTIONS ACROSS THE EU MISSIONS (2021-2027)

EU Mission	Number of topics in which SI is explicitly mentioned out of the total number published across annual WPs between 2021-2027 (%)			
	WP 2021-2022 (%)	WP 2023-2024 (%)	WP 2025 (%)	WP 2026-2027 (%)
Cancer	3/9 (33,3)	3/10 (30)	2/6 (33,3)	5/13 (38,5)
Cities	2/8 (25)	1/6 (16,6)	0/3 (0)	0/7 (0)
CCA	5/12 (41,6)	5/12 (41,7)	0/6 (0)	0/9 (0)
Ocean	10/23 (43,5)	2/18 (11,1)	0/8 (0)	0/10 (0)
Soil	3/19 (15,8)	1/18 (5,6)	3/13 (23,1)	3/12 (27,3)
Other ⁴	2/5 (40)	3/9 (33,3)	0/4 (0)	1/5 (20)

The figures illustrate the number of topics in which SI is mentioned explicitly, out of the total published by the Mission for the relevant time period (e.g., SI is explicitly mentioned in descriptions of 3 of the 9 topics (33,3%) published in WP2021-2022 for the Cancer Mission).

This review reveals an uneven and, for three out of five Missions, a declining pattern of explicit inclusion of SI between 2021 and 2027 (see Table 1). Across the period, the proportion of topics explicitly mentioning SI varies considerably both between Missions and over time, though several figures rest on a small numbers of topics in total.

The **Cancer Mission** is the only Mission to maintain a relatively consistent level of inclusion, with SI featuring in roughly a third of topic descriptions across all four periods.

³ We searched for explicit mentioning of the term social innovation. This search criterion might have overlooked SI inclusion in implicit ways, such as using similar concepts.

⁴ Topics referring to cross-cutting activities, New European Bauhaus or multiple missions (e.g. HORIZON-MISS-2025-06-CIT-CANCER-01 which refers to both the Cities and Cancer Missions) are summarized under the category “other”.

These topics refer to it as a means of enabling participative methods, which appears a stable theme throughout the different WPs.

For the *Cities, Climate Adaptation, and Ocean and Waters Missions*, SI features in a notable share of early WP topics but disappears entirely as of the 2025 WPs. In the case of the Oceans and Waters Mission, this is likely in part due to the establishment of lighthouses⁵ in major European sea and river basins in the early WPs, which are supposed to support the development of a wide array of innovative solutions including technological and SIs. For Cities and Climate Adaptation, the later zero values coincide with WPs containing comparatively few topics. Topics signalling SI in the Cities Mission often refer to just transition approaches and user engagement, while topics in the Climate Mission refer to the establishment of demonstrator solutions combining social and technological innovations.

The *Soil Mission* shows the opposite trajectory: a low starting point followed by a modest recovery in the later programmes. This later emphasis on SI is possibly coupled with the establishment of living labs which later topics call for. These living labs should foster SI explicitly, including via the integration of social sciences and humanities (SSH) within actions.

Taken together, these figures suggest that, with the partial exception of the Cancer and Soil Missions, the explicit inclusion of SI in EU Mission WPs has generally declined across successive programming periods. The stability of SI inclusion in the Cancer Mission is likely due to its employment to garner participatory engagement across the portfolio of activities in a Mission with a heavy research component. In the Missions that involve the set-up of large-scale collaborative mechanisms – such as living labs, lighthouses, and demonstrator projects – SI appears to be engaged as part of these processes. This observation also suggests that explicit reference to SI likely coincides with the maturation of the activities within a Mission – increasing in Missions that are progressively setting up their operational infrastructures (e.g., the Soil Mission) and decreasing in those where such infrastructure is set up earlier on (e.g., the Oceans Mission) (also see ERRIN, 2023; R15, Interview, February 2026). **Across the five Missions, a picture emerges of SI as relating to new forms of engagement that advance Mission activities and as one component of a broader mix of social and technological innovations.**

While explicit inclusion of SI in WP topics is a useful indicator for SI embedding in the Missions, it is neither necessary nor sufficient on its own to stimulate the emergence of SI. In other words, SI can emerge in projects resulting from calls that are not SI-tagged, and projects resulting from SI-tagged topics may not include SI. This is illustrated by the 11

⁵ The European Commission presents Lighthouses as “hubs and platforms that support the development and deployment of transformative, innovative solutions across various domains – technological, social, business, and governance. They ensure fast progress towards the achievement of Mission objectives, while having significant impact on society in the river and sea basins through science and technology.” <https://projects.research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/en/funding/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes-and-open-calls/horizon-europe/eu-missions-horizon-europe/restore-our-ocean-and-waters/mission-lighthouses>

projects selected as inspiring examples of SI in the Missions in the SIMF project's Deliverable 1.1 (see Zirngiebl et al., 2025⁶).

TABLE 2: PROJECTS WHERE SI WAS IDENTIFIED CONTRASTED WITH SI TAGGING OF THE SOURCE TOPICS AND PROJECTS

Project where SI was identified through SIMF analysis	Topic	Topic tagged* SI	Project tagged* SI
HuMUS, MountResilience, EcoDaLLi	2021-SOIL-02-06; 2022-CLIMA-01-06; 2021-OCEAN-02-04	Yes	Yes
UP2030, e-Quol	2021-CIT-02-01; 2023-CAN-01-04	Yes	No
4PCAN	2022-CAN-01-01	No	Yes
GOV4All, InBestSoil, REALLOCATE, AGORA, TiDAL ARTS	2023-SOIL-01-08; 2021-SOIL-02-05; 2022-CIT-01-01; 2021-CLIMA-02-05; 2023-OCEAN-01-11	No	No

* Tagging refers to the explicit identification of SI, either as a component expected by the EC within the topic ("Topic tagged SI") or as an element included in the project description ("Project tagged SI"). The table therefore distinguishes between EC call for SI, project identification as including SI, and SI identified through our own analysis. For example, UP2030 and e-Quol resulted from topics explicitly tagged by the EC as calling for SI, the projects themselves did not refer to SI explicitly, but our analysis identified socially innovative aspects – based on the SIMF definition – in these projects. Conversely, some projects (e.g., GOV4All, InBestSoil, REALLOCATE, AGORA and TiDAL ARTS) were identified as containing SI-related elements despite neither the topic nor the project being explicitly SI-tagged.

Among the 11 projects analysed, three explicitly used SI within their project description and originated from SI-tagged topics, two originated from SI-tagged topics but did not use SI explicitly within their project description, one referenced SI despite following under a non-SI-tagged topic, and five were neither topic- nor project-tagged despite including socially innovative aspects. This substantiates the finding that **SI tagging is neither necessary nor sufficient on its own to stimulate the emergence of SI**. This implies that SI tagging may contribute to the active consideration and/or stimulation of SI within Mission activities. However, even when not explicitly tagged, SI emerges in projects that seek to instigate new ways of doing, thinking and/or organising, illustrating its centrality to the transformative efforts of Missions. The topics within which SI was not explicitly mentioned, but where the SIMF identified SI, called for a focus on stakeholder engagement (all topics), acknowledgement of the needs of marginalised groups (2022-CIT-01-01), behavioural change (2022-CAN-01-01) or the development and experimentation with new business models (2021-SOIL-02-05). These findings suggest that to **leverage SI toward**

⁶ [Publication announcement \(D.1.1\) – SI Mission Facility](#)

Mission objectives, it is useful for topics to not only explicitly call for SI but also for new ways of doing, thinking and/or organising in response to the tackled challenges.

2.1.2. SI INCLUSION ACROSS THE PROGRAMMING CYCLE

Next to the explicit call for SI in the WPs, there are other ways that SI is embedded in the EU Missions. Interviewees shared their perspectives on how SI is embedded across the overall Missions programming cycle (European Commission, 2023b; 2021a). They shared their views of the barriers and enablers to SI embedding.

The findings from the interviews – elaborated per Mission — suggest that the Cities Mission has the most prevalence of factors supporting SI integration across its programming cycle, particularly prominent within the programming, implementation, and monitoring, evaluation and learning stages (see Table 3 and Table 4). This is followed by the Oceans and Waters, Climate Adaptation, and the Soil Mission where factors supporting SI integration were more unevenly spread across the stages. However, the depth of evidence varies considerably across Missions (reflecting both the maturity of their activities and interviewee coverage). The Cities Mission, in particular, generated substantially more coded material than others, findings for the Soil Mission were comparatively thinner, and non-available⁷ for Cancer. The characterisations below are thus indicative of stakeholder perceptions rather than exhaustive of the factors supporting SI inclusion across the programming cycle as well as their spread across the cycle.

TABLE 3: INTERVIEWEE PERSPECTIVES ON SI EMBEDDING ACROSS THE EU MISSION PROGRAMMING CYCLE

EU Mission	Programming	Project selection	Implementation	Monitoring & learning
Cities	Light Green	Light Orange	Dark Green	Dark Green
Oceans	Light Orange	Light Green	Light Green	Light Orange
Climate Adaptation	Light Orange	Light Orange	Light Green	Light Orange
Soil	Light Orange	Light Orange	Light Orange	Light Orange

The table illustrates the number of times interviewees mentioned a factor that enables the integration of SI in a given Mission, relating to a particular programming cycle stage (dark green – a factor relating to this stage is frequently mentioned (more than 10 times); light green – a factor relating to this stage is moderately mentioned (between 5 – 10 times); light orange – a factor

⁷ An interview could not be conducted with policy actors with a focus on the Cancer Mission during the interview period. However, reflections relating to this Mission were covered within some interviews that provided cross-Mission insights and they are also embedded in workshop insights (see Chapter 2.2) as actors with insights specific to this Mission attended. Their insights on SI in the Cancer Mission will also be followed up on in the continuing activities of the SIMF project.

relating to this stage is occasionally mentioned (between 1 – 5 times); dark orange (a factor relating to this stage is not mentioned).

Turning to the specific factors that enable SI embedding across the programming cycle, Table 4 reveals both cross-Mission patterns and variations. Across the Missions, SI is supported particularly through implementation platforms, distributed funding mechanisms such as cascade funding, and collaborative or territorially embedded approaches, including stakeholder co-creation activities, local experimentation as well as regional demonstration actions. These enabling conditions differ in their breadth and institutionalisation. In the Cities Mission, they form a comparatively dense and interconnected support architecture, whereas in the other Missions they appear more selective, indirect or concentrated in particular stages of the programming cycle. Table 4 summarises the full range of enablers identified by interviewees, while the discussion below focuses on the most prominent and analytically significant factors.

TABLE 4: INTERVIEWEE PERSPECTIVES ON THE ENABLERS OF SI EMBEDDING IN 4⁸ OF THE 5 EU MISSIONS

Cities	Oceans	Climate Change Adaptation	Soil
Support to and from implementation platform	<i>Cascade funding</i>	<i>Cascade funding</i>	Inclusion of SI to address adoption barriers of solutions
Building and creating access to skills, expertise, and network in SI	Activities aimed at co-creation	SI inclusion under related topics e.g., SSH	Included as a core of the programming of the mission
Climate City Contracts and working at city level	EU project funding calls	Support via the implementation platform	Combining complementary innovation instruments through cross programme collaboration ⁹
<i>Cascade funding</i>	Working at regional level	Regional demonstration projects and replicators	
Cross-city exchanges and relationships	Local experimentation		
Other socially impactful activities and terminologies			
National regulations e.g., regulatory sandboxes			

⁸ An interview could not be conducted with policy actors with a focus on the Cancer Mission during the interview period. However, reflections relating to this Mission were covered within some interviews that provided cross-Mission insights and they are also embedded in workshop insights (see Chapter 2.2) as actors with insights specific to this Mission attended. Their insights on SI in the Cancer Mission will also be followed up on in the continuing activities of the SIMF project.

⁹ For example Mission collaboration with EIC – European innovation council.

Local bottom-up solutions			
Recognition in cities of the need for societal change for climate neutrality			
Link to other SI-related EU programmes e.g., the New European Bauhaus (NEB)			
SI as a cost-effective response to challenges			

The table includes all the factors highlighted by interviewees. The text below elaborates on the most frequently mentioned factors.

Experts with insight on the **Cities Mission** highlighted various enablers of the integration of SI in the Mission. Of these, five enablers were frequently mentioned. First, the crucial role of a substantively funded implementation platform (NetZeroCities) in supporting the integration of SI in the implementation of activities in cities, and second, relatedly, the creation of access to skills, expertise, and a network on SI. The Cities Mission implementation platform has received at least €127¹⁰ million across its first two Specific Grant Agreements, which is substantially larger than other Mission platforms, such as Cancer Mission Hubs¹¹ and MIP4Adapt¹², whose funding has been approximately €6 million per individual funding period. One interviewee explained the advantages of a larger centralised implementation platform as providing a one-stop shop that offers support to all cities in Europe – starting with the 112 that have Climate City Contracts – on Mission implementation, including a specific work package on supporting cities with SI embedding (*R14, Interview, February 2026*).

Third, working through Climate City Contracts (CCC) was highlighted as supportive of systematic and integrative action towards transforming cities for climate neutrality. Climate City Contracts are co-created roadmaps to climate neutrality agreed between a city, its citizens, and stakeholders, and which bring together diverse actors to plan and collaborate on city-wide climate neutral action. By going beyond project-based to city-wide planning, CCC orient activities within the Mission from piecemeal project activities towards broader scale action, that illuminates the role of SI. Fourth, cascade funding – where beneficiaries of EU-funded projects provide small-scale financial support to third parties – enables ‘smaller’ actors to access funding for activities, thereby stimulating grassroots innovation. Finally, cross-city learning activities which are prominent within the Mission allow cities to exchange on innovative practices.

¹⁰ [Specific Grant Agreement n°1 to Scale the Cities Mission Platform | SGA-NZC | Project | Fact Sheet | HORIZON | CORDIS | European Commission](#); [SPECIFIC GRANT AGREEMENT N°2 TO SCALE THE CITIES MISSION PLATFORM | SGA2-NZC | Project | Fact Sheet | HORIZON | CORDIS | European Commission](#)

¹¹ [Establishing of Cancer Mission Hubs: Networks and Synergies | ECHoS | Project | Fact Sheet | HORIZON | CORDIS | European Commission](#)

¹² [Sustaining the Mission Implementation Platform for the Adaptation to Climate Change Mission - European Climate, Infrastructure and Environment Executive Agency](#)

Unlike the Cities Mission, interviewees found SI inclusion across the programming cycle of the Oceans and Climate Adaptation Missions to be selective and indirect. In the Oceans Mission, a synthesis of interviewee responses identify SI as being included in Mission activities mainly through three key actions: 1) Arising organically during the implementation of activities in projects benefiting from cascade funding; 2) In projects that call for co-creation activities; and 3) Through explicit inclusion of SI in calls for proposals. Across these activities, interviewees reported SI as remaining dispersed – with limited learning across the projects and limited systematic integration across the Mission.

Climate Adaptation shows a similar pattern; a more selective and indirect embedding. In the context of this Mission, interviewees reflected on the lack of explicit SI integration in Mission projects. However, they understood SI to be integrated through support structures like cascade funding and support from the implementation platform, and indirectly via adjacent concepts (such as via SSH-tagged topics). This emerged as another mission where SI is present but not yet systematically embedded.

Interviewees identified the **Soil Mission** as showing an implementation-centred embedding of SI. It was often harnessed as a way to support the uptake of technological innovations within communities, and less as a solution in itself. One interviewee viewed solutions relating to the Mission challenges as usually requiring innovation in the form of adaptation of a solution in a way that enables its uptake in different contexts (characterised by different soil types, land uses, cropping systems, and cultures), rather than ‘completely disruptive new solutions’ (*R7, Interview, February 2026*).

Read against the findings in the earlier section on ‘SI inclusion in the programming stage’, the findings relating to SI in the Cities, Cancer, and Soils Missions may appear contradictory. While analysis of the WP topic descriptions show SI to be most included within the Cancer Mission, in practice, it appears to be most supported in the Cities Mission. We suggest that this relates partly to the implementation structures established within the Cities Mission to support SI. As highlighted through the interviews explained above, the explicit demand for SI inclusion in the Climate City Contracts coupled with significant support to cities to integrate SI in their activities – via the Mission implementation platform¹³ – strengthen SI integration in the Mission portfolio. This suggests that while the **explicit tagging of SI in topic descriptions is crucial for its embedding in Mission activities, just as crucial, is the development of implementation structures that enable its systematic harnessing.** Regarding the Soil Mission, while analysis of the call texts make SI appear to be included in the Missions, interviewee reflections that it is primarily harnessed instrumentally as a way to ease the adoption of technological solutions, might explain its limited prevalence across the programming cycle. Interviewee perspectives of SI integration in the Oceans and Waters and Climate Adaptation Missions are consistent with the findings of more limited and diffuse SI inclusion via the topic texts of the WPs.

¹³ See also [NetZeroCities Results & Publications: Driving Urban Climate Action](#)

This section has shown that explicit SI inclusion in the Mission WPs is declining. Where SI has been included, it refers mainly to new forms of actor engagement. Furthermore, SI arises both in instances where projects originate from SI-tagged topics and otherwise. This implies that while important, it is not sufficient to tag SI in topics, conditions to allow its implementation or the amplification of related impacts across the programming cycle are equally important.

Together these findings illustrate three insights namely: 1) The explicit tagging of SI in WP descriptions is crucial. However, it needs to be coupled with more structured implementation support systems to enable its operationalisation in the relevant local contexts. 2) SI appears to be embedded largely in activities where there is an explicit need for stimulating engagement and/or collaboration among diverse actors. This harnesses the dimension of SI as new social relations and forms of organisation. It might however be under leveraging SI as new practices (for instance spanning the material and economic domain as discussed later in the report) and as new institutional arrangements (although this may evolve with time, since it relates to the institutionalisation of new practices). 3) Cascade funding appears to be a strong enabling condition for SI embedding across several Missions. Actions seeking to enhance the implementation of SI could therefore consider such funding instruments. The next section explore ways to strengthen the integration of SI in the EU Missions, in ways that can bolster its contribution to their desired goals.

2.2. SUGGESTIONS FOR STRONGER SI EMBEDDING ACROSS THE PROGRAMMING CYCLE

This section discusses various starting points for bolstering the integration of SI in the EU Missions, and in MOIP more broadly. It is based on a synthesis of insights from interviews and from a stakeholder workshop in Brussels that brought together relevant actors — including Mission secretariats, other policy actors engaged in Mission or SI-relevant themes, social innovators, researchers, among others – who drew on their expertise and experiences in this regard. Actors reflected on the Mission approach as a governance innovation — that created new opportunities for locally driven SI – and largely argued that it should be maintained. For instance, they highlighted the use of cascade funding as a mechanism through which smaller organisations and local initiatives more readily access EU funding. While cascade funding did not originate in the EU Missions¹⁴, participants noted that the Missions' orientation toward local experimentation and citizen engagement through approaches such as living labs creates greater scope for its use. Maintaining mission-oriented approaches and strengthening such practices that enable SI could help unlock the potential of SI for addressing urgent societal challenges. The key suggestions

¹⁴ See for instance inclusion in Horizon 2020, the Framework Programme prior to Horizon Europe – with which Missions are embedded: [H2020 Info Day Call 1 - Frequently Asked Questions on FIRE+ | Shaping Europe's digital future](#)

highlighted for better integrating SI in Missions are elaborated below and organised along the programming stages discussed in section 2.1. This structure is maintained for clarity of presentation, however, the suggestions often span all stages of the programming cycle, albeit in different ways.

a) Programming and project selection

Although distinguished analytically in Section 2.1., programming and project selection are presented jointly since they form part of a continuous decision-making process through which strategic priorities are operationalised into funded projects. Three key suggestions were elaborated here.

- ***The need to include SI and the societal dimension more broadly in the current EU Missions and broader mission-oriented R&I programming in the upcoming 10th Framework Programme (FP10).*** Work Programmes have been made less prescriptive over time (European Commission, 2025), deliberately leaving space for applicants to define solutions. Yet the topics and calls still define the problem to be addressed, signal what types of innovation are expected, and in doing so, shape how Missions are implemented. Where SI is absent or only implicit at the programming and project selection stages (including in call texts and project evaluation criteria), it may be less likely to be taken up in later stages. Workshop participants therefore emphasised the need to make SI more explicit in WPs and project selection processes so that it can be systematically carried through into implementation, monitoring, evaluation and learning.

Crucially, this is not only a matter of implementation. Where the societal dimension (including SI) enters only after a challenge has been framed, it is reduced to supporting the implementation or uptake of solutions whose direction has already been determined, most often through technological framings (European Regions Research and Innovation Network [ERRIN], 2023). Broader societal perspectives need to be more strongly embedded in how mission challenges are defined and in how solutions are designed, otherwise the transformative potential of SI is limited even before implementation begins. To this point, actors recommended the inclusion of a horizontal societal dimension across the proposed FP10 funding architecture¹⁵. This would require all funding streams to consider broader societal perspectives alongside technological considerations when defining priorities, designing interventions, and evaluating impact. It would also make socially innovative solutions eligible for the larger-scale investment instruments (such as the proposed EU Competitiveness Fund¹⁶) through which scaling can be supported. This could contribute to addressing a key challenge of limited resources to scale successful socially innovative pilots facing some of the current Missions (such as

¹⁵ At the time of writing, the architecture of FP10 (2028–2034) remains under negotiation. European Commission, Horizon Europe 2028–2034: a framework for excellence, innovation and competitiveness: [Horizon Europe - Research and innovation - European Commission](#)

¹⁶ [EU budget 2028-2034](#)

Cities¹⁷) and potentially any future missions defined within an R&I framework programme.

- **Future work programmes should give greater weight to deeper transformation within societal systems and localised contexts, not only to integration across countries.** Future WPs should give greater weight to depth of transformation alongside breadth of coverage. At present, challenges and solutions tend to be considered relevant for action at EU level when they involve multiple countries. This has encouraged Missions to favour broad-scale solutions spanning many countries, as seen in the cross-city learning arrangements of the Cities Mission, the demonstrator-replicator arrangements of the Climate Mission, and the Living Labs of the Soil Mission. This design of WPs is based on the idea of ‘EU added value¹⁸’ – over national action — as being assessed largely through transnational reach, that is, the number of countries, cities, or regions engaged. While such approaches generate valuable exchange and replication, they often produce projects with wide geographical reach but limited depth of impact within any single socio-technical system (e.g., mobility, food, energy) or context. Actors recommended that future WPs explore alternative routes to EU added value. For instance, depth of systemic transformation, demonstrated in a specific context and rigorously enough to be learned from elsewhere (for instance through learning across national competence centres on SI), could equally align with the requirement for EU projects to contribute transnational added value.
- **SI understanding should be broadened:** Social innovation extends beyond stakeholder engagement and participatory processes. It is also a way of reshaping society to address the root causes of societal challenges. However, as discussed in Chapter 2.1. the former understanding and/or deployment of SI remains widespread within the WPs, potentially limiting the extent to which the transformative potential of SI is leveraged. This implies that in addition to explicitly calling for SI, a clarification that this entails new practices related not only to new ways of relating and organising but also to doing and thinking, may stimulate a capturing of a broader range of the SI’s transformative impact.

b) Implementation mechanisms

Below we explain the two key suggestions highlighted in relation to the implementation phase.

- SI needs a **long-term and connected collaboration ecosystem for funding and scaling:** As introduced in the programming and project selection section above, potentially innovative initiatives implemented within EU Missions, struggle with scaling solutions. In response to this, actors recommended the development of a longer-term and connected collaboration ecosystem that can support the funding and scaling of such solutions. Currently, EU-Mission funding tends to support the

¹⁷ R19, Interview, February 2026

¹⁸ [European added value](#)

launch but not the sustenance of new practices. Here, one suggestion was more effort to link to private funding, including philanthropic sources, which was core to the conceptual foundation of the Missions (Mazzucato, 2018) but appears less systematically integrated in the implementation. Another was to more strongly connect the Mission to other relevant EU funding mechanisms such as European Social Funds, regional partnerships, among others.

- **Innovative mechanisms for broader actor engagement:** The objective is not to involve all actors at all stages, but to ensure that the relevant actors are engaged at the appropriate moments and in roles that reflect their current and/or potentially new knowledge, resources, responsibilities and capacities to act. A social innovation perspective can support this by designing mechanisms that enable more effective participation and collaboration among actors that are currently excluded, insufficiently connected or constrained by existing institutional arrangements. This may involve strengthening the role of civil society actors that are often marginalised in innovation processes, while also ensuring the continued involvement of established actors such as industry, public authorities and research organisations where their contributions are required. The central challenge is therefore not simply to broaden participation, but to reconfigure practices, roles and relationships in ways that allow heterogeneous actors to coordinate their contributions, navigate tensions and work together more effectively in addressing societal challenges.

c) Monitoring, evaluation and policy learning

In order to amplify the impact of SI in relation to the Missions and MOIP more broadly, it is crucial to ascertain and learn from the societal impacts of SI as well as from the effectiveness of programming and implementation actions in relation to the targeted challenges. However, as established in the introduction, the challenge of attributing impact to particular SIs is a longstanding challenge for all stakeholders, ranging from researchers, SI practitioners, and funders and investors. Actors discussed two key suggestions to contribute to efforts to tackle this challenge.

- ***The need for indicators that cover both shorter- and longer-term societal impact:*** Monitoring systems of projects tend to focus on quantifiable outputs which fails to capture the often hard to quantify social dimension of innovation. Aspects such as increased community resilience, behavioural change or institutional reconfigurations are difficult to quantify despite their importance. Ascertaining the impact of SI requires a longer-term perspective: We need better ways to capture and communicate its impact by identifying how short-term KPIs relate to longer term systemic and societal transformations.
- ***The need to remove structural barriers to collaboration between projects:*** Many projects pursue similar objectives and develop complementary solutions, yet the EU R&I funding structure does not adequately incentivise exchange and collaboration. Projects frequently lack the time and financial resources to collaborate. Actors suggested several measures to facilitate collaboration, including ring-fenced funding for joint reflection and knowledge exchange, shared platforms for

documenting and disseminating successful social innovations – connected e.g. through CSA actions with a clear mandate to amplify impacts across solutions; and common monitoring frameworks and indicators that enable learning across projects.

This section has outlined explicit starting points for more strongly embedding SI within the current and future mission architectures. It offers an entry point to address the challenges identified in sections 2.1 of the decreasing and broadly uneven explicit inclusion of SI in Missions architecture. To make a case for stronger SI embedding in the current Missions and broader MOIP, the next section elaborates on the emerging pathways through which SI contributes to Mission goals and objectives.

3. SI IMPACT PATHWAYS IN EU MISSIONS

3.1. SI IMPACT PATHWAYS: A BRIEF CONCEPTUAL BASIS

Before turning to pathways, it is worth stating what is meant by **impact** in this context. Within the SI literature, impact is not reducible to the measurable outputs of a discrete intervention. Since SIs are defined by changes in doing, thinking and/or organising in society (Avelino et al., 2019; Howaldt & Schwarz, 2010; Wittmayer et al., 2022), their impact is relational and systemic rather than attributable to a single actor or product. We follow this understanding of impact. Impact is understood here as changes in practices, social relations, forms of organisation, and institutional arrangements that address societal challenges in new ways, and the pathways below make contribution rather than causal claims.

A **pathway** simply refers to the processes encompassed between a given starting point and an end goal. When analysing impact, it refers to interacting mechanisms that mediate particular effects in society or in a societal sub-system in relation to a specified goal (Douthwaite et al., 2003; Hietschold et al., 2023). To conceptualise impact pathways, the field of program theory evaluation provides a useful starting point. Program theory evaluation approaches, such as logic analysis and theory of change, examine the assumptions and mechanisms underlying the effects related to an intervention. They unpack the conditions and contextual factors that must hold for particular effects to emerge as intended (White, 2009).

In this field, an **impact pathway** constitutes the following key elements: a starting point, a goal, the processes in between, as well as the assumptions and enabling conditions on which the realised or desired effects are based. The effects permeated in society by an intervention may range from temporally immediate outputs, intermediate outcomes, and wider and often longer-term impacts (Bührer et al., 2022; Douthwaite et al., 2003). Considering the complexity (nonlinearity, uncertainty, unpredictability) of SIs and the challenges they often address, Antadze & Westley (2012) and Weaver & Kemp (2017) highlight ‘developmental evaluation’ as an alternative approach to understanding the impacts of SIs. This approach foregrounds attention to the iterative process through which the effects of SIs emerge; constantly moving back and forth between and across problems and solutions. Alongside these evaluation traditions, sustainability transitions research zooms out beyond interventions or programmes to conceptualise impact pathways as patterns of change within societal systems, offering a more systemic framing of how innovations permeate their effects through society over time (Leach et al., 2007; Rosenbloom, 2017). We draw on these three complimentary understandings of impact

emergence and evaluation to propose and discuss plausible SI impact pathways. Looking beyond the immediate Mission setting for the conceptual basis of impact pathways is essential, as the effects of SIs unfold through longer-term and systemic processes of change that cannot be fully captured by focusing only on the intervention, programme, or policy context in which they emerge.

In theory, building on the concepts above, an SIIP constitutes the mechanisms that mediate between an SI and societal change, encompassing the elements introduced above. However, in this report, we develop SIIPs in relation to the EU Missions which are still in early stages of their implementation. Their timeline does not allow an exhaustive elaboration of SIIPs, as dynamics such as the actual outputs of EU-Mission-funded projects are still emerging. In light of this reality, we construct partial pathways including four main elements (also see Figure 2):

- 1) **The challenge:** This highlights the main societal challenge tackled by the Mission.
- 2) **Key SIs:** This includes the innovations involving new practices and social relations (ways of doing and/or thinking) and new forms of organisation and institutional arrangements (ways of organising) identified from EU-Mission-funded and alternatively funded¹⁹ projects. The practices relating to a similar way of doing, thinking and/or organising are bundled into a broader SI. We deliberately take a broad approach to defining what counts as innovative, so some included practices may be borderline, but excluding them risked overlooking emergent forms of SI that are not yet fully established or recognised as such, particularly given the early implementation of many of the initiatives within which these SIs are embedded.
- 3) **The outcomes and impact domains:** This includes the outcomes either reported by the projects as actualising from their activities or those envisioned from these activities. While it is too early to explicate the impacts of these activities, the **impact domains** to which they already contribute or are likely to contribute could be outlined. The activities were analysed for their potential contribution to socio-economic, socio-material or governance and institutional domains. These domains were selected because conceptual works on the contribution of SI to societal change identify them as significant.
 - In relation to **socio-economic arrangements**, SIs such as sharing-economy platforms contribute to changes in the organisation of economic activities, including how value is created, exchanged, and recognised. This may involve developing alternative forms of production and exchange, as well as broadening conceptions of value beyond financial returns to include social and environmental outcomes (Longhurst et al., 2016; Terstriep & Rehfeld, 2022).
 - Concerning **socio-material relations**, SIs contribute to changes in the relationships between people, technologies, infrastructures, practices, and knowledge systems (Avelino et al., 2019; Pel et al. 2020). Pel et al. (2020) characterise SIs as involving changes in social relations that simultaneously

¹⁹ Alternative funding arrangements observed across the projects include non-partisan alliances, national and local government funding, Horizon 2020 scaling grants, charitable foundations, community funds, citizen shareholder investment models, and philanthropic foundations.

reshape material objects (e.g., technologies and infrastructures), everyday practices and routines, and the ideas and narratives through which these are understood.

- Regarding **governance and institutional arrangements**, SIs, such as forms of participatory budgeting or citizen assemblies, influence or reshape the rules, norms, and governance arrangements that regulate social arrangements (Cajaiba-Santana, 2014; Haxeltine et al., 2016). They contribute to such changes by, among others, fostering participatory and collaborative approaches that blur the boundaries between the state, market, and civil society. Through such engagements, they may institutionalise new forms of participation, redefine accountability, redistribute power, and reconfigure the functioning or structuring of dominant social, cultural, economic, and political institutions (Haxeltine et al., 2016; Pel et al., 2020).
- 4) The **EU Mission goals and specific objectives (SOs)**: This includes the official EU Mission goals and their SOs outlined in the implementation plans per Mission, to which the analysed projects either explicitly aim with their activities or which our analysis identified as most plausible for the activities to contribute to.

We thus adopt a working definition of SIIPs as the connection between a SI and the EU Mission objectives and goals it likely contributes to, through its practices and outcomes (see Figure 2). There is a disclaimer for interpreting the findings: It is possible to identify SIs different from the ones we identify, or to link the identified SIs to different outcomes, impact domains and Mission objectives. This is to say that our mappings are analytical judgements, grounded in our selected methodology, rather than fixed categories. While developed in relation to the five EU Missions, this conception of SIIPs is intended to be built upon, extended, and transferred to MOIP more broadly.

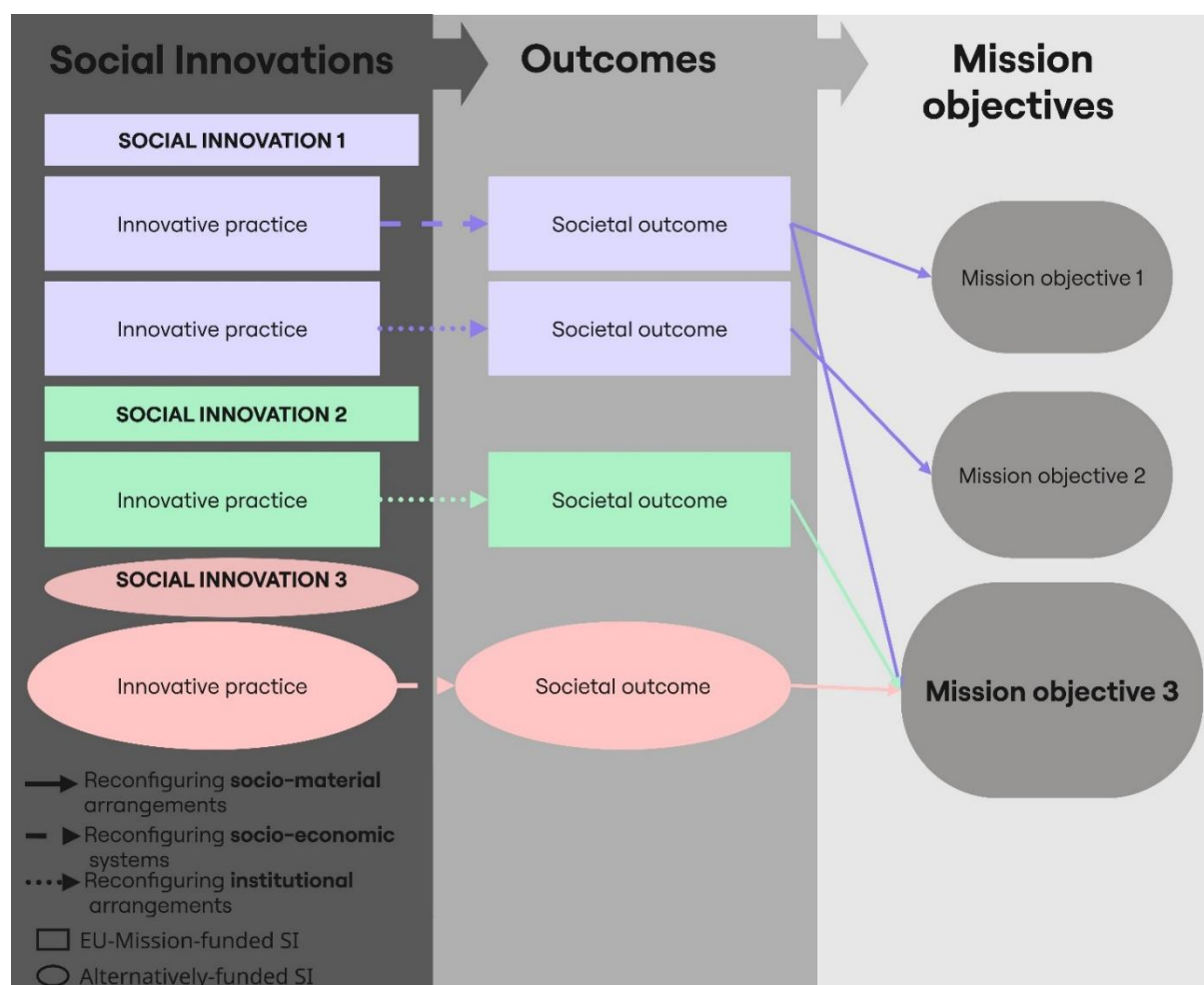


FIGURE 2: ILLUSTRATION OF SI IMPACT PATHWAYS IN RELATION TO EU MISSION OBJECTIVES. NOTE: THE CHALLENGE AND MISSION GOAL IS NOT SHOWN IN THE VISUALISATION TO ALLOW CLARITY. (OWN ELABORATION)

Pathway 1: SI from EU-Mission-funded projects, outcomes, and the Mission objectives they link to.
Pathway 2: SI from EU-Mission-funded projects, outcomes, and the Mission objectives they link to.
Pathway 3: SI from Alternatively funded projects, outcomes, and the Mission objectives they link to.

3.2 SI IMPACT PATHWAYS IN RELATION TO MISSION CLIMATE NEUTRAL CITIES



SOCIETAL CHALLENGE AND MISSION GOAL AND OBJECTIVES

Cities produce more than 70% of global CO2 emissions (European Commission, 2021c), making them key contributors to the global warming that induces climate change. The Cities Mission aims to support at least 100 cities to become climate-neutral by 2030 and to ensure that these cities act as experimentation and innovation hubs to enable all European cities to follow suit by 2050. The Mission challenge, goals and SOs are illustrated in Figure 3 below:



FIGURE 3: MISSION CITIES (SOURCE: EUROPEAN COMMISSION, 2024B)

SOCIAL INNOVATIONS, OUTCOMES, & CONTRIBUTION TO MISSION OBJECTIVES

The database analysis identified five SIIPs in relation to the Cities Mission across both EU-Mission-funded and alternatively funded projects (see Figure 4). Of the five constituent SIs, three were identified in EU-Mission-funded projects, one only in alternatively funded projects, and one across both EU-Mission-funded and alternatively funded projects. They relate to new practices around spatial planning, urban governance, and the organisation of mobility, energy and waste systems in ways that contribute to efforts towards climate neutrality in cities. The SIs, their likely outcomes and the Mission objectives they contribute to are outlined below.

EU-Mission-funded SIs

SI 1: Sustainability-centred and participatory urban planning involves new ways of planning cities that centre social, economic and environmental sustainability alongside citizen participation. The novel practices subsumed in this innovation include: i) the reallocation of street space away from cars — which produce high greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs) — towards more active and sustainable modes such as walking and cycling (see REALLOCATE project in *Box 1*; also *Figure 4*); ii) a city-centred planning approach that couples climate neutrality with liveability by integrating four levers (policy and regulatory reform, stakeholder capacity-building, solution prototyping, and governance-financing alignment); and iii) making climate-neutrality investments more bankable by demonstrating the wider public value they generate, such as improved liveability, wellbeing, and urban quality. Through these practices, the source projects aim to contribute to an increased use of more sustainable mobility modes in cities; more transformative city-level planning and redesign towards climate neutrality; and to the de-

Box 1 – Reallocation of street space to prioritise active and sustainable transport modes

In the REALLOCATE project, mobility spaces are treated as social systems that serve each citizen's needs instead of as engineering puzzles. Policy officers and citizens co-design active, sustainable spaces, linking the need for including justice in the transition to carbon neutrality. The project delivers data analysis and strategic planning tools to make this process concrete, as well as community engagement and participation advice and methodologies. An example is the 'walk audit', a participatory tool to map how citizens experience their neighbourhood.

More information: <https://reallocatemobility.eu/> and Zirngiebl et al. (2025)

risking of long-term urban investments for climate neutrality. They contribute to SO1, SO2, SO5, and SO7, with their potential impacts spread across the socio-material, governance, and institutional domains.

SI 2: Collaborative multistakeholder governance for climate neutral urban transitions involves new forms of collaboration among diverse actors on climate neutral urban transitions. It includes four bundles of innovative practices: I) systematic peer exchange and learning across cities on relevant solutions (e.g., by twinning cities); II) Local Green Deals (LGD) — voluntary collaboration agreements between a city and its local stakeholders (businesses, civil society, academia, and citizens) to accelerate sustainability action through shared ownership and commitment (EC, 2021); III) Climate City Contracts (CCC) — co-created roadmaps to climate neutrality agreed between a city, its citizens, and stakeholders, which bring together diverse actors including those not usually involved in such processes (R14, Interview, February 2026), to plan and collaborate on city-wide climate neutral action; and IV) connections between high-output industry and municipalities to plan for a low-carbon ecosystem. The outcomes related to these practices, include an increasing number of cities adopting climate-neutrality ambitions, the translation of high-level climate goals into concrete local governance arrangements, and reductions in industrial emissions through new forms of collaboration to SO1, SO2, SO4, SO5, and SO7.

SI 3: Integrated user-centred mobility system focuses on reorganising urban mobility around accessibility, sustainability, and inclusion. Associated practices include: I) centring

public transport in mobility ecosystems; II) reshaping mobility behaviour through rewards, incentives, and local economic links that make public and active travel the easier, more attractive choice compared to private car use; and III) stronger coordination of multi-modal services, particularly with public transport as a backbone. In Rome, for example, the UPPER²⁰ project is making it easier for people to switch between buses, metro, and shared transport at the same hubs. These practices contribute to increased use of public transport and more inclusive mobility systems. The pathway operates across institutional, socio-economic, and socio-material domains by combining new mobility norms and governance arrangements with behavioural and economic incentives and more integrated transport infrastructures. It links to SO2 and SO5.

Both EU-Mission-funded and Alternatively funded SI

SI 4: Waste management as a socially embedded resource circulation system seeks to redefine urban waste as a resource rather than a disposal problem. Embedded practices include reframing cooking oil waste as a valuable production input and actively engaging schools in urban waste management. These practices contribute to reduced pollution from oil waste and increased intergenerational engagement around urban societal challenges. By changing norms and practices around oil waste and enhancing engagement in urban waste management the SI contributes to impact in the institutional domain, and to SO5.

Alternatively funded SIs

SI 5: Decentralised energy governance seeks to democratise energy production and governance by shifting ownership, decision-making, and benefits closer to citizens and communities. For example, in energy co-operatives, residents jointly set up and own renewable installations such as rooftop solar, raising the capital themselves through community share offers and then collectively deciding how the installation is run and how its income is used, for instance by selling the power locally at below-market prices and channelling surplus into a community fund (See Box 2). In doing so, the energy system is decentralised through new rules for the production and consumption of renewable energy and through new roles for citizens, who shift from passive consumers to "prosumers" who produce, own, and manage energy themselves. The socio-material fabric is also altered, introducing both the idea that renewable installations can be collectively built and owned and changing the energy provisioning system itself and how it is managed. Through

Box 2 – Decentralised energy governance

The Repower London initiative establishes energy co-operatives across London. These co-operatives are owned by the citizens through a Community Benefit Society legal entity, who owns and leads the set-up and maintenance of solar installations. Potential income of the co-operation through excess energy generation is invested in a Community Fund. Repower London also supports green education and trainings, e.g. through preparing adolescents for employment in the Green Energy Sector and organising drama classes at primary schools to teach children about climate change.

More information: <https://www.repowering.org.uk/> and Zirneibl et al. (2025)

community funds and new jobs in these energy systems, including for marginalised youth,

²⁰ <https://www.upperprojecteu.eu/>

the socio-economic domain is altered as well. SI 5 predominantly contributes to SO2 and SO5.

SI IN THE CITIES MISSION

Taken together, the five pathways illustrate the potential contribution of SI to the Cities Mission. The governance and institutional domain emerges as the dominant impact area, although several pathways also contribute to reshaping socio-material and socio-economic arrangements.

The predominantly targeted objectives include SO5, SO2, and SO1. These objectives aim to upgrade the administrative, financial and policy capacity of cities to pursue climate neutrality along with stimulating the engagement of diverse stakeholders in activities (SO5), to establish research and innovation (R&I) pilots as well as scaling and replicating solutions (SO2), and to set up a demand-driven and city-focused process based on R&I (SO1). The orientation of these objectives towards active stakeholder engagement could explain the substantial contribution of SI, which as discussed in section 2 has been predominantly employed in activities around stakeholder engagement. SO3, SO4 and SO7, which relate mostly to making connections to EU initiatives, skills and expertise (3&4) or to regulatory and funding levers appear less contributed to. This could point towards a harnessing of SI in relation to local more than to national or international solutions and to implementation with EU-Mission funding rather than with other funding sources – a gap which was also identified during the policy interviews. Perhaps most striking is the apparent lack of a link to SO6 (a strong and transparent monitoring system for climate neutrality) – an area where technical solutions likely play a stronger role²¹. Consistent with scholarly debates, as introduced in Section 3.1. above, interviewees also highlighted the difficulty in SI impact measurement as a challenge to its harnessing.

Across the Mission, it appears that substantial EU funding has been directed towards SIs that aim to integrate systems, such as via integrated urban planning (SI1), integrated mobility systems (SI3) and collaborative governance (SI2). What appears to be less funded but where alternatively funded projects are playing a role is in solutions that are targeting action in particular systems (such as in energy – SI5 and waste – SI4). While holistic approaches are necessary for alignment, they risk superficial implementation if the underlying system regimes remain unchanged, limiting the Mission's transformative impact. Attention therefore needs to be balanced between holistic breadth and deep systemic intervention.

²¹ The Mission implementation plan identifies the monitoring system as anticipated to include short term indicators (e.g., progress on the implementation of activities such as the level of cities' interest in climate neutrality), medium term indicators (e.g., delivery of tangible results such as mobilization of financing towards climate neutrality), and longer term impact indicators (e.g., measuring progress towards the climate neutrality of cities).

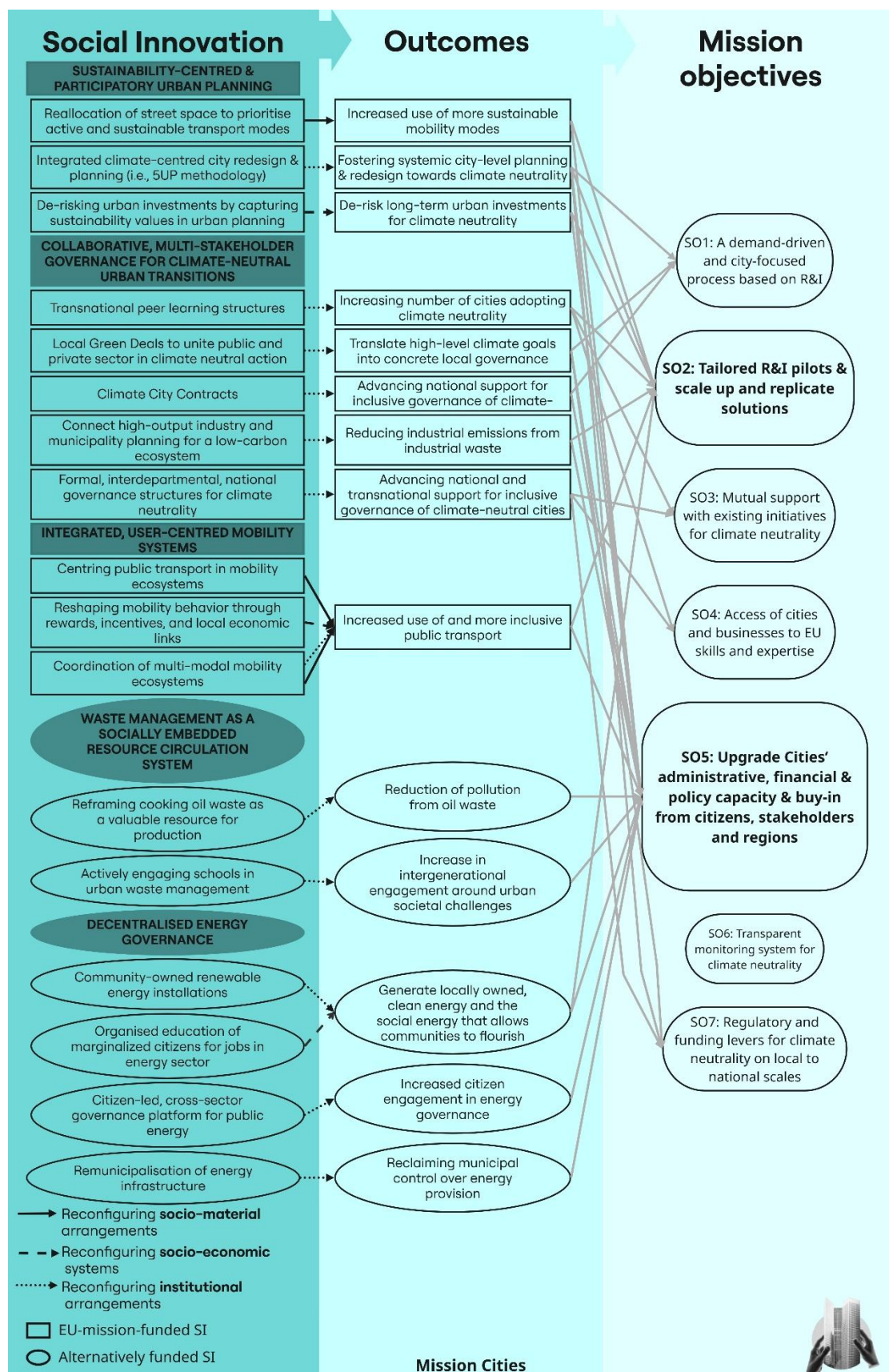


FIGURE 4: SI IMPACT PATHWAYS IN RELATION TO THE CITIES MISSION

3.3 SI IMPACT PATHWAYS IN RELATION TO MISSION RESTORE OUR OCEANS AND WATERS



SOCIETAL CHALLENGE AND MISSION GOAL AND OBJECTIVES

The Mission ‘Restore our Oceans and Waters’ responds to persistent and increasing man-made challenges such as pollution from plastic litter and the use of chemical pesticides as well as biodiversity loss that are putting global oceans and waters, and consequently European societies at serious risk. By 2030, It aims to protect 30% of the EU sea area as well as restore marine ecosystems and 25.000 km of free flowing rivers, and prevent and eliminate pollution by reducing plastic litter at sea, nutrient losses and use of chemical pesticides by 50%; and make the blue economy climate-neutral and circular with net-zero maritime emissions. The Mission challenge, goals and SOs are summarised in Figure 5 below.

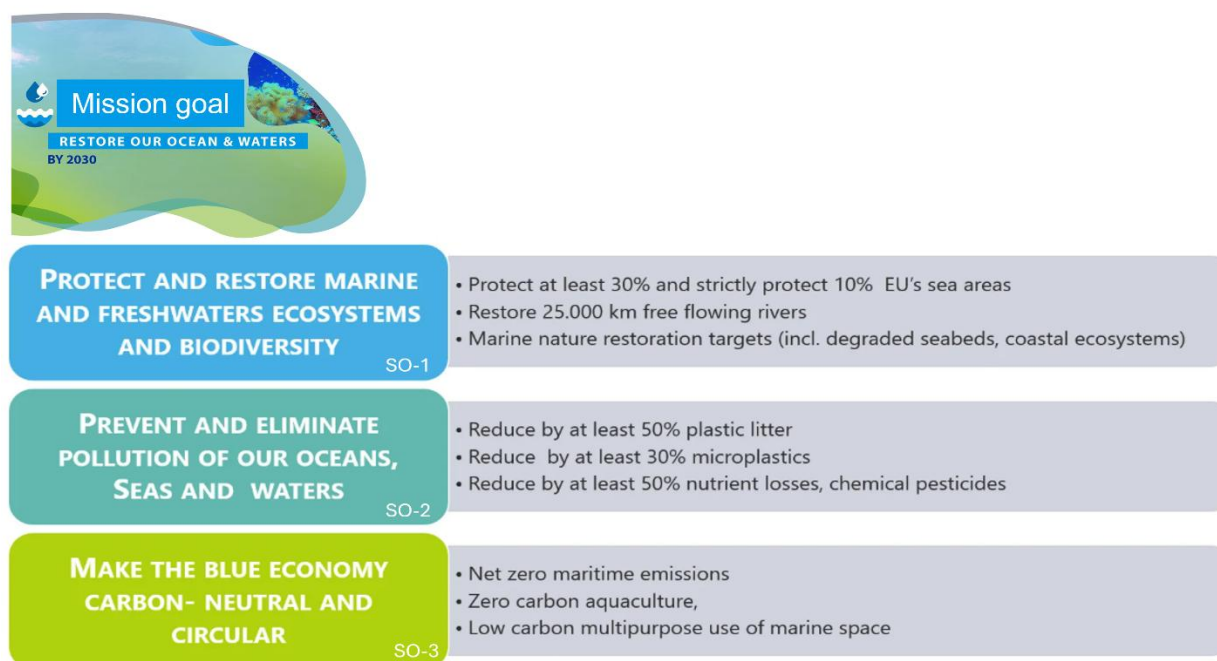


FIGURE 5: MISSION RESTORE OUR OCEAN AND WATERS (ADAPTED FROM: BLUE MISSION MED, 2026²²)

SOCIAL INNOVATIONS, OUTCOMES, & CONTRIBUTION TO MISSION OBJECTIVES

²² <https://bluemissionmed.eu/mission-restore-our-ocean-and-waters/>

The database review identified seven SIIPs in relation to the ‘Restore our Ocean and Waters’ Mission that are mobilised through both EU-Mission-funded and alternatively funded projects (see Figure 6). Six pathways were identified from EU-Mission-funded projects and one from alternatively funded projects. Together, they touch on new forms of ecosystem governance, cultural engagement, marine conservation, environmental monitoring, and seafood systems governance.

EU-Mission-funded SIs

SI 1: Experiment-driven basin ecosystem governance seeks to overcome fragmented approaches to water governance through basin-scale experimentation and coordination. It is exemplified by a case in the Danube basin, where a connected system of living labs brings together public authorities, innovators, and other stakeholders across the basin’s many countries and administrative jurisdictions to co-create and test solutions for water management, biodiversity, and climate adaptation (see Box 3). By strengthening the role and coordination of experimentation and innovation in ecosystem-based water management, SI’s key contribution lies in the institutional domain. The range of activities

Box 3 – Experiment-driven basin ecosystem governance

The EcoDaLLI project aims to change water management from a technical and administrative task to a social one, creating five Living Labs where stakeholders co-create solutions to water, climate and biodiversity challenges, ranging from the Danube source to the Black Sea. Through knowledge sharing, institutional levels and countries are connected. Each Living Lab has a specific focus, linked to the needs in the specific Danube unit. E.g. the Middle Danube Living Lab focuses on sustainable agricultural practices related to water use, while the Danube Delta Living Lab focuses on biodiversity through marine protected areas and sustainable fisheries.

and thematic foci of this pathway lead it to contribute to all three of the Mission’s SOs.

SI 2: Aquatic governance through transdisciplinary co-creation broadens participation in the governance of aquatic systems by combining artistic, scientific, and civic perspectives in processes of imagining sustainable futures for oceans and waters. This is exemplified by initiatives that pair artists with scientists and local communities to co-create public artworks and immersive experiences about the state of oceans and inland waters, and using these encounters to challenge the binary thinking that separates humans from nature (see the TidalArts project²³; see Figure 7). The practices within SI2 contribute to changing narratives around human-nature relations in ways that encourage the protection of marine and freshwater ecosystems (SO1).

SI 3: Participatory and socially legitimised governance of marine protected areas addresses the challenge of governing marine protected areas (MPAs) at ecological rather than administrative scales, and of securing the legitimacy these areas need to be effective. Associated practices include integrating societal legitimisation into MPA governance by involving stakeholders from the outset and aligning top-down regulatory requirements

²³ <https://tidalarts.eu/>

with bottom-up societal expectations; promoting ecosystem-scale governance of MPAs and fisheries restricted areas (FRAs); and creating translocal governance arrangements that connect individual MPAs into ecologically coherent networks across sea basins. These practices contribute to socially legitimate, ecosystem-scale marine governance capable of meeting conservation objectives in ways that stakeholders accept and support, and primarily contributes to SO1.

SI 4: Integrated ecosystem-based transformation of seafood systems seeks to transform how sustainability is defined, valued, and embedded throughout seafood value chains. It challenges dominant understandings of fishing practices and reassigns value by making the sustainability of a catch visible and economically rewarded along the chain, for instance by improving traceability and market transparency so that sustainably caught seafood can command recognition and access to new markets and by repositioning fishers as co-designers of lower-impact fishing practices. The pathway contributes to improved economic and environmental resilience of fishing communities. Unlike other EU-Mission-funded SIs, its primary contribution lies in the socio-economic domain, as it seeks to reshape incentives, value creation, and economic relationships within seafood systems. It primarily contributes to SO1 and SO3.

SI 5: Citizen science for environmental monitoring expands participation in environmental monitoring by scaling bottom-up approaches, such as engaging school classes and youth groups to collect standardised data on plastic pollution in rivers and along coastlines following a scientific protocol. The pathway contributes to increased intergenerational engagement around environmental pollution while generating knowledge that can support environmental protection efforts. In doing so, it contributes to SO2. It operates primarily through governance reconfiguration by opening scientific processes to citizens and creating new roles for non-experts in environmental monitoring and stewardship.

SI 6: Information-driven behavioural change incentives in seafood consumption seeks to influence consumption patterns through large-scale awareness raising around sustainable seafood production and consumption. Through practices such as publishing seasonal lists of expert-recommended sustainable species and mobilising chefs, fishmongers, and retailers to flag these choices to consumers, the pathway contributes to increased consumption of sustainably produced and harvested seafood by EU citizens. By contributing to changes in norms, values, and behavioural incentives surrounding seafood consumption, it contributes to SO1.

Alternatively funded SIs

SI 7: Buy-out based conservation finance: The SI demonstrates an alternative route towards sustainable fisheries management. Through privately raised funds, initiatives buy out commercial fishing quotas and netting rights from fishers targeting endangered or depleted fish stocks, compensating them and supporting their transition to alternative livelihoods, thereby altering the economic incentives that drive overexploitation. The pathway contributes to the restoration of endangered fish stocks (such as salmon), and in doing so contributes to SO1. By contributing to the reshaping of the economic structures

Box 4– Buy-out based conservation finance

The North Atlantic Salmon Fund (NASF) contributes to aquatic ecosystem restoration in the Atlantic and Arctic basin. Next to more classic conservation practices, such as global networking and awareness campaigns, protests, conferences, legal processes and more, the NASF pioneered an economic and governance innovation. The non-profit organisation negotiates buyouts of commercial salmon fishing quotas, providing compensation and support in a transition to new ways of life to fishers and local landowners who are willing to forgo netting and fishing. This restructures market incentives towards ecological restoration rather than extraction. The actions of the NASF have also triggered regulatory changes at a national level in Greenland and the Faroe Islands.

More information: <https://nasf.is/en/> and Zirngiebl et al. (2025)

governing access to and use of fishery resources, its primary contribution lies in the socio-economic domain.

SI IN THE OCEANS AND WATERS MISSION

The seven SIIPs relating to the Oceans and Waters Mission contribute to all three of the Mission's SOs. This could be related to the relatively broad definition of the objectives, compared for instance to the Cities Mission. This implies that several activities are more likely to contribute to all three objectives. However, SO1 – that seeks to protect and restore marine and freshwater ecosystems and biodiversity – stands out as the most prominently contributed to. This likely relates to its broader nature which captures various contributions, unlike SO3 on circularity or SO2 on pollution that might be viewed as more technically oriented. Similar to the Cities Mission, contribution to the institutional domain also predominates, but coupled with contributions to the socio-economic and socio-material domains. Overall, the EU-Mission-funded SIs tend to favour breadth – in this case the integration of various ecosystems – while alternatively funded SIs are more targeted.

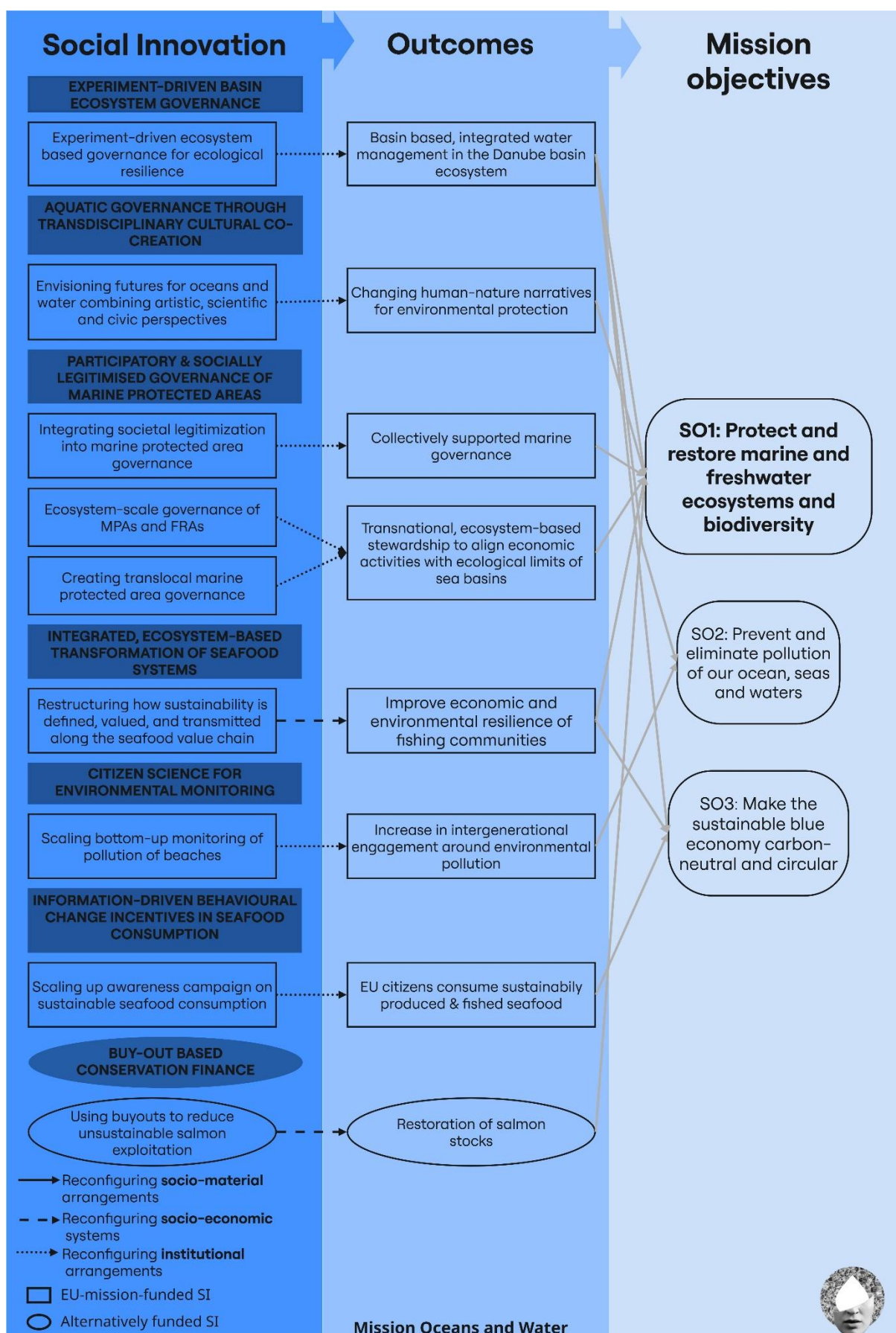


FIGURE 6: SI IMPACT PATHWAYS IN RELATION TO THE OCEANS AND WATERS MISSION

3.4. SI IMPACT PATHWAYS IN RELATION TO MISSION CLIMATE ADAPTATION



SOCIETAL CHALLENGE AND MISSION GOAL AND OBJECTIVES

The Mission ‘Adaptation to Climate Change’ tackles the urgent challenge of adapting to climate change and related disruptions such as extreme weather, wildfires and infectious diseases. It aims to support at least 150 European regions and communities to become climate resilient by 2030. The Mission challenge, goals and SOs are shown in Figure 7 below.

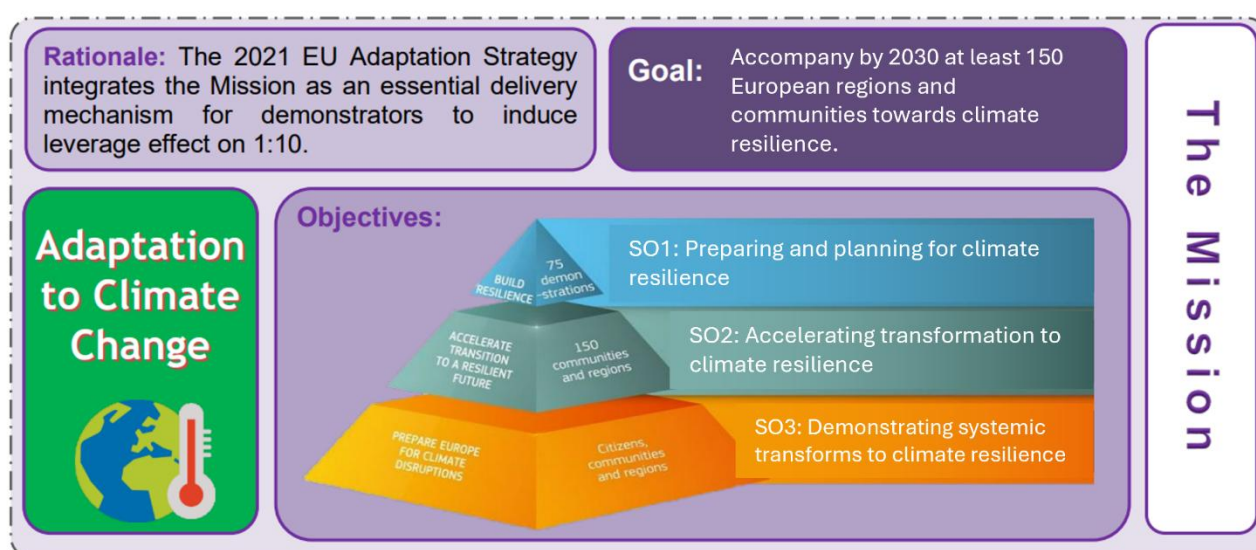


FIGURE 7: MISSION ADAPTATION TO CLIMATE CHANGE (SOURCE: EUROPEAN COMMISSION, 2024B)

Given the breadth of the three SOs, the innovative practices were not only linked to the mission objectives but to the specific constituent steps. The Climate Change Adaptation Mission Implementation Plan (European Commission, 2021d) specifies the SOs as follows: **SO 1 *Preparing and Planning for climate resilience*** aims to enhance the understanding of climate risks. Research and innovation activities supported towards this objective focus on the improvement of climate risk and vulnerability frameworks and their accessibility (step 1). **SO 2 *Accelerating transformations to climate resilience*** focuses on the development of planning processes and specific solutions. It entails the set up of local governance structures including the advance of citizen science activities (step 2), the formulation of a vision for a resilient future and pathways to reach it by the participating regions (step 3), as well as the development and testing of transformative solutions (step 4). **SO 3 *Demonstrating systemic transformations to climate resilience*** centres on scaling up and diffusing the developed solutions defined as breakthrough innovations.

Activities funded towards this objective seek to create impact through the large-scale deployment of transformative innovations (step 5) and the set up of additional demonstrators across European regions and communities fostering the reconciliation of regional visions and adaptation pathways (step 6).

SOCIAL INNOVATIONS, OUTCOMES, & CONTRIBUTION TO MISSION OBJECTIVES

The database review identified six SIIPs in relation to the Climate mission harnessed through both EU-Mission-funded and alternatively funded projects (see Figure 8). Of the seven SIs, four were identified in EU-Mission-funded projects and three in alternatively funded projects. The SIs revolve around new modes of governance and planning, business engagement, waste management, community living, and job creation in relation to climate adaptation.

EU-Mission-funded SIs

SI 1: Sustainability-centred, inclusive & participatory regional planning involves new planning practices for climate change adaptation. These practices include new or more systematically applied forms of stakeholder engagement, like the set-up of local adaptation councils or the incorporation of marginalized groups in urban planning processes. It further entails the experimentation with new planning instruments by operationalising ecosystem services. The SI is implemented on the local or regional level ensuring that adaptation strategies as well as adaptive practices meet local needs. It contributes to enhancing local planning capacities and, thus, contributes to step 2 of the Mission's SO2 *Accelerating transformations to climate resilience*. It operates primarily through contributing to reconfiguring institutional arrangements by opening up and

Box 5 – Sustainability-centred, inclusive & participatory regional planning

The Mount Resilience project is funded under a topic aiming to support systemic transformation by combining technological and SIs. It operationalises the topic objectives through the set up of local climate adaptation councils to support long-term embedding of climate adaptation in regional governance. The councils discuss climate adaptation strategies, that are transformative, including environmental, economic and social sustainability of all relevant sectors. The strategies are translated into policy through implementation roadmaps and regional climate adaptation action plans that include new technological and social practices, specifically considering the perspectives of vulnerable groups. More information: <https://mountresilience.eu/> and Zirngiebl et al. (2025)

widening planning processes and connecting a variety of stakeholders from different sectors.

SI 2: Collaborative governance for climate change adaptation centres on new approaches to facilitating learning and exchange across regions and cities. Built into topic calls as the task to establish demonstrator and replicator regions, this practice tackles issues of diffusing and scaling context-sensitive solutions. While climate change

adaptation and resilience depends on local and regional adaptation measures, municipalities and regions can learn from each other's experiences with specific adaptation measures and decision-making processes. This results in aligned and accelerated regional and urban efforts on climate change adaptation, real-life examples of implemented adaptation processes and measures and, as such, contributes to step 2 and 4 of the Mission's SO2 on and prepares the ground for contributing to step 6 of SO3 *Demonstrating systemic transformations to climate resilience* in later stages. The SI primarily operates through reconfiguring institutional arrangements by creating space for exchange and learning beyond formally responsible institutions.

SI 3: Climate change adaptation embedded in economic solutions tackles the integration of climate change adaptation and business operations. The practices assigned to this SI comprise the engagement of local companies to integrate climate change adaptation in their business strategy and the compensation of landowners for providing ecosystem services through market mechanisms. The SI-related practices broaden the responsibility for climate change adaptation to local companies, on the one hand, and employ business logics to conservation topics, on the other hand. The outcomes of these practices concern the financial sustainability of local businesses as well as the (financial) support of urban blue-green infrastructure networks. The SI contributes to step 4 of the Climate Mission's SO2. By tackling businesses' responsibilities and applying market logics to conservation, it primarily operates through contributing to reconfiguring socio-economic systems.

Alternatively funded SIs

SI 4: Waste management as socially embedded resource circulation system fosters a reuse and repair culture. The practice associated with this SI is marked by a closed-loop cooperation between education, repair and retail of waste. The circular use of materials and strengthened repair capabilities in society contribute to climate resilience in local communities resulting not only in a strengthened circular economy and overall sustainability, but increased awareness on waste management practices. It prefigures how repair and re-use practices could look like and establishes a suitable infrastructure for connecting the practices. The SI, thus, contributes to step 4 of the Climate Mission's SO2. It primarily operates through reconfiguring socio-material arrangements and changing the norms and values around waste and re-use.

SI 5: Sociocratic sustainable community living is an alternatively funded SI which tackles community living in an encompassing manner. The associated practice describes an ecovillage as a specific form of solidary and sustainable co-housing. While the SI strengthens social cohesion and fosters a community spirit, it sets an example of ecological-friendly housing, at the same time. It is, thus, one other example of a SI contributing to step 4 of the Climate Mission's SO2. Through demonstrating how changes in building and living could manifest, it primarily reconfigures socio-material arrangements and changes norms and values surrounded with community-living and care.

Box 6 – Inclusive employment in green jobs

'Viveiro de Emprego Regenerador' is an initiative funded through the framework of Portugal Social Innovation aimed at re-employment of unemployed and low-skilled people in regenerative jobs in four specific areas: the seeds, native forest and organic gardens, medicinal herbs and natural cosmetics, agritourism/nature tourism and food transformation and healthy eating. Following a 'learning by doing' format, participants are introduced to theoretical and practical knowledge by practitioners in the field. All training takes place in a Biovillage. The participants are guided in the set-up of new business in the fields they are trained in, through e.g. network events with potential funders.

SI 6: Inclusive employment in green jobs is an alternatively funded SI that focusses on green job creation for marginalized groups, thereby tackling challenges of labour market integration and climate change adaptation alike and in a practical manner. Through this integrated approach, the pathway contributes to step 4 of the Mission's SO2. By focusing on the creation of green jobs, which serve the environment as well as the socio-economic needs of marginalized groups, it primarily reconfigures socio-economic systems.

SI ROLE IN THE CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION MISSION

Taken together, the identified pathways suggest that SI contributes to the Climate Mission primarily by transforming how planning processes are organised, adaptation measures designed and developing context-sensitive solutions (step 2 and 4 of SO2). Institutional and socio-economic reconfiguration emerge as the dominant impact domains in EU-Mission-funded SIs.

The pathways predominantly contribute to step 2 and 4 of the Mission's objective SO2. The EU-Mission-funded SIs contribute to step 2 of SO2, which enhances the establishment of local governance structures and thereby accelerates transformation to climate resilience. Through their focus on experimenting with different collaborative planning formats and enhancing the preparedness of a wide range of actors, they establish a common-ground for deciding upon and experimenting with suitable solutions (step 4). In particular, the transformation of economic instruments and signal of preparedness by businesses contribute to step 4 of SO2 by developing and testing new solutions. Yet, step 4 of SO2 is most clearly addressed through the alternatively funded SIs' holistic focus on waste management and community living proving a comprehensive demonstration of systemic, transformative solutions. The identified pathways, further, reveal that SO3 *Demonstrating systemic transformations to climate resilience* is not addressed by the SIs, so far. Yet, the establishment of local governance structures and experimenting with inter-regional exchange and learning formats explicitly referring to specific solutions might prepare the ground for removing barriers to the diffusion of solutions and the establishment of cross-regional transformative solutions.

Similar to the Cities and Oceans Missions, EU-Mission-funded SIs appear to be mostly about broadscale, system-level planning and coordination, while alternatively funded SI relate more to actual implementation of innovative practices in defined fields, in this context in waste management and community living. A finding in the Climate Adaptation

Mission is the limited SI contribution to SO1. This objective is defined to focus on technical assessments around climate risks which lend themselves to technological rather than to SI. This can be problematic as it suggests that technical and technological oriented approaches are relied upon for problem framing in the Mission, and then societal engagement — where SI is most relevant — is introduced later on in the process. This finding aligns with the findings in 2.1. that SI is not yet structurally embedded across the Mission’s programming logic but rather in dispersed ways during implementation, limiting its harnessing in the Mission’s planning for transformation.

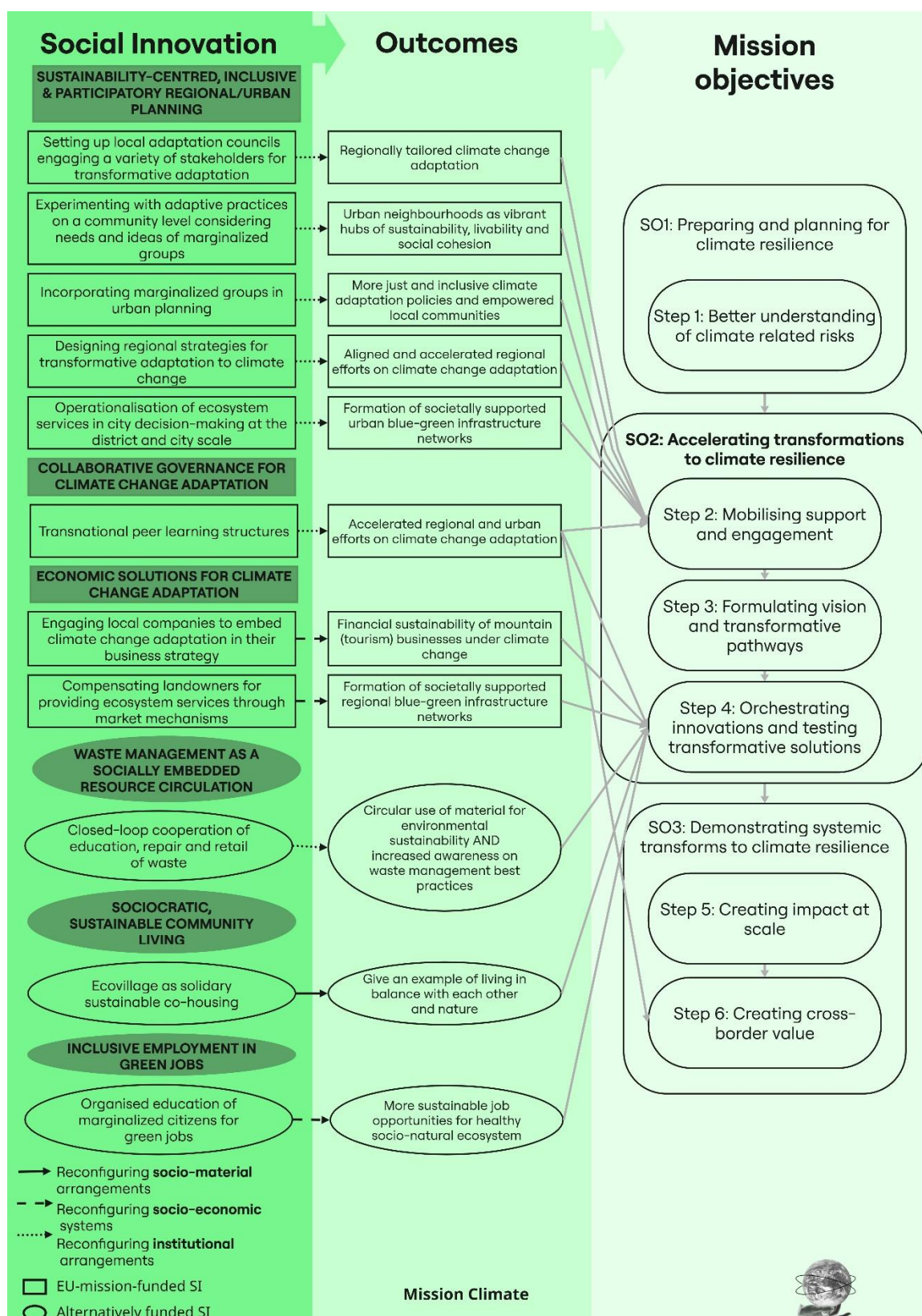


FIGURE 8: SI IMPACT PATHWAYS IN RELATION TO THE CLIMATE ADAPTION MISSION

3.5 SI IMPACT PATHWAYS IN RELATION TO MISSION SOIL



SOCIETAL CHALLENGE AND MISSION GOAL AND OBJECTIVES

The mission 'A Soil Deal for Europe (Mission Soil)' aims to establish 100 living labs and lighthouses to lead the transition toward healthy soils by 2030 through co-creation of sustainable agricultural practices and the promotion of soil literacy. The Mission challenge, goals and SOs are shown in Figure 9 below.

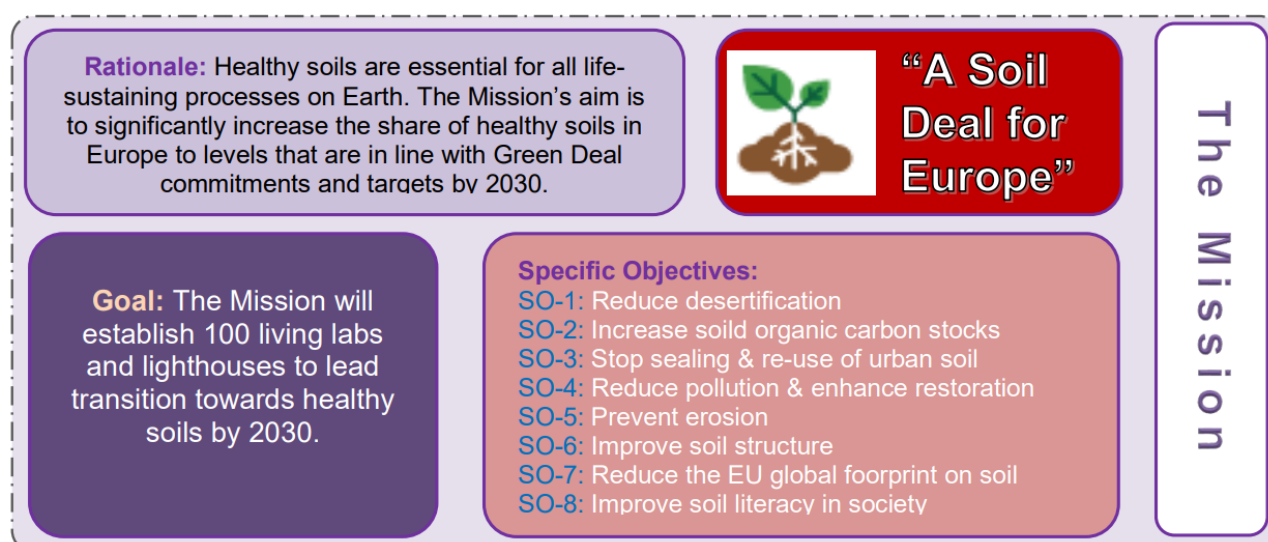


FIGURE 9: MISSION A SOIL DEAL FOR EUROPE (SOURCE: EUROPEAN COMMISSION, 2024B)

SOCIAL INNOVATIONS, OUTCOMES, & CONTRIBUTION TO MISSION OBJECTIVES

The database analysis identified six SIIPs in relation to the Soil Mission across both EU-Mission-funded and alternatively funded projects (see Figure 10). Of these six, three were identified in EU-Mission-funded projects and three in alternatively funded projects. The SIs aim to embed soil health into sustainable and alternative agricultural management practices, the fields of education, regional and local governance, cultural engagement, and all parts of the food value chain (from production to consumption).

EU-Mission-funded SIs

SI 1: Business models for soil ecosystem services connects ecosystem services with market dynamics, enabling a variety of actors, such as farmers, nature conservation organisations and municipalities, to take measures that benefit soil health. Through novel value chains for organic products (e.g., sustainability labels), carbon farming certificates,

carbon markets, and markets for ecosystem services, the SI creates mechanisms through which ecosystem services that were previously external to markets become economically recognised and rewarded. The business models and emerging new social relations also constitute a novel framing of soil health. Investment in soil health is framed as beneficial for ecosystems as well as for humans, contributing to changing norms and values around soil use. The application of novel value chains and ecosystem service valuation practices across diverse contexts — including agriculture, forestry and urban environments — is reflected in the wide range of Mission objectives targeted²⁴ (SO2, SO3, SO4, SO6 and SO8).

SI 2: Regional participatory governance for soil health management creates new social relations in urban and rural municipalities amongst the quadruple helix (constituting knowledge institutes, industry, multi-level governments, and the civil society including NGOs). The innovation focuses on dialogue to enhance awareness on the socio-ecological system, embedding soil health awareness in urban planning and agricultural practices. The dialogue is part of a new governance approach, which makes use of participatory vision making, translating hopes and visions into long-term strategies toward for instance rejuvenizing municipal lands or establishing organic districts. Territorial Management Agreements are used as a tool to establish agreement on regional strategies amongst the quadruple helix. Through the established new discourse on the socio-ecological system and the vision making processes resulting in territorial agreements, new sustainable soil management practices are promoted to reduce soil pollution, enhance restoration and

Box 7 – Regional participatory governance for soil health management

The finished HuMUS project aimed at bringing together quadruple helix stakeholders in different regions across Europe and establish agreements, the Territorial Management Agreements, on soil health management practices. The 34 established agreements are novel in their holistic coverage of various relevant stakeholders related to soils ranging from scientists, civil society, conservation NGOs to city mayors. Through the free training programme for Soil Stewards, local stewards were trained to facilitate the regional and municipal dialogues for vision making. The end of the HuMUS project in December 2025 initiated the translation phase of the Territorial Management Agreements into local policies.

More information: <https://www.humus-project.eu/> and Zirngiebl et al. (2025)

improve soil structure (SO4 and SO6). This novel approach also contributes to a broader soil literacy in society (SO8).

SI 3: Education and training on socio-ecological ecosystems focusses on establishing a large array of locally adapted soil and general sustainability education and training practices. Examples are new job profiles and skills (e.g. “soil ambassadors”, “soil consultants”), counter-mapping of municipal soils, education for school children, applied workshops, symposia, urban eco-forestry projects, permaculture testbeds and courses on individual transitions to a sustainable lifestyle. The SI aims to reshape the general

²⁴ For example, in Lithuania, ecosystem service valuation supports the redesign of urban spaces to reduce erosion and flooding, while in Latvia forestry associations are compensated for management practices that enhance soil carbon and improve soil structure.

perception of soil from a mere substrate to a fragile ecosystem, in order to influence informal institutions with the aim of impacting regulations and practices, and reconfigure larger-scale institutional arrangements. These approaches also seek to contribute to increasing soil literacy across society (SO8).

Alternatively funded SIs

SI 4: Regional citizen-owned joint organic food chain is an innovation that goes beyond strategy making for organic food regions, to creating financial links between all actors in a local food system through locally organised share trading. This incentivises a larger-scale shift towards sustainable agricultural practices and creates local, closed food chains, with the potential to reconfigure the local socio-economic systems. As consumers are co-owners of organic farms and food processing companies, the connection to their food is enhanced, increasing soil literacy in society (SO8) while the organic, local agricultural practices contribute to reducing soil pollution, and to enhancing restoration (SO4). By reshaping food system relationships, production-consumption patterns, and value chains

Box 8 – Regional citizen-owned joint organic food chain

Regionalwert AG is a novel term for citizen-owned joint stock companies that have been established in regions throughout Germany since 2006. Through the stock companies, biological and organic business in the entire food value chain, from farms to food processing business, are financially supported. Producers, consumers and shareholders are brought together through transparent, locally organized share trading, avoiding the stock exchange. Currently a large part of Germany is covered through nine distinct Regionalwert AGs. Through this concept, companies that create socio-ecological value not captured in conventional financial plans are supported, making the embedding of soil health into food value chains more economically feasible

towards more sustainable models, the innovation also contributes to reducing the EU's global footprint on soils (SO7).

SI 5: Low-threshold local participatory soil governance is a starting point for participatory planning processes, that includes local citizens in the management of municipal soils by increasing their awareness on land use issues, soil sealing and related village or city development projects. Interested citizens and organisations are encouraged to engage in strategic planning of municipalities and regions. The SI aims to contribute to novel informal and formal institutional arrangements, through an increase of soil literacy in society (SO8).

SI 6: Artistic practices as media for raising awareness and triggering action is another SI that increases soil literacy in the civil society (SO8), via activities in the cultural sector. The innovation is to bring the topic of soil into the museum, engaging civil society through contemporary art and media displays established by natural scientists and artists. The aim is to not merely raise awareness but also create a sense of urgency to trigger action.

SI IN THE SOIL MISSION

A distinctive aspect of the EU's Soil Mission is the strong contribution of the socially innovative aspects to soil literacy (SO8). Socially innovative approaches that address

formal or informal education, as well as professional education and training, are explicitly encouraged within the Mission. Across the identified pathways, SI contributes to SO8 by increasing awareness of soils as a socio-ecological system and by fostering changes in perceptions, practices and behaviours related to soil. This includes education and training activities (SI3), cultural approaches to raising awareness (SI6), and participatory governance approaches that embed soil health awareness among local actors (SI2 and SI5).

Beyond SO8, SI contributes to several objectives related to improving soil conditions and promoting sustainable soil management, particularly SO4 – reducing soil pollution and enhancing restoration, and SO6 – improving soil structure to enhance habitat quality for soil biota and crops. For example, participatory governance approaches (SI2 and SI5) support collective strategies for reducing soil pressures and improving soil management practices, while alternative food systems and value chains (SI1 and SI4) create incentives for more sustainable agricultural practices and contribute to reducing the EU's global footprint on soils (SO7). SI1 additionally contributes to SO2 – conserving and increasing soil organic carbon stocks – through the development of carbon farming certificates and ecosystem service markets that create new mechanisms for valuing soil-related benefits. Overall, SI emerges as means of enabling governance, institutional, and socio-economic change in relation to soil management²⁵.

Comparing EU-Mission-funded and alternatively funded SIs reveals a difference in the types of SI that are supported. EU-Mission-funded SIs primarily focus on establishing enabling structures for sustainable soil management through new market mechanisms, participatory governance arrangements and education and training. These approaches seek to reshape the institutional, socio-economic and knowledge systems within which soil management takes place. While interviews revealed SI as primarily focused on enabling the adoption of solutions (Chapter 2), the pathway analysis identifies a deeper role in reshaping the arrangements that enable such adoption. Alternatively funded SIs place greater emphasis on grassroots experimentation with new forms of ownership, citizen participation and cultural engagement, exploring alternative ways of organising relationships between citizens, communities, and soil.

²⁵ The lack of a socially innovative focus on SO1 - reducing land degradation related to desertification may reflect the methodology followed rather than a lack of relevant innovative practices. A review of the Soil Mission Platform identified several potentially innovative practices within EU Mission-funded projects that were not identified as such in our analysis. See <https://mission-soil-platform.ec.europa.eu/project-hub/project-hub>

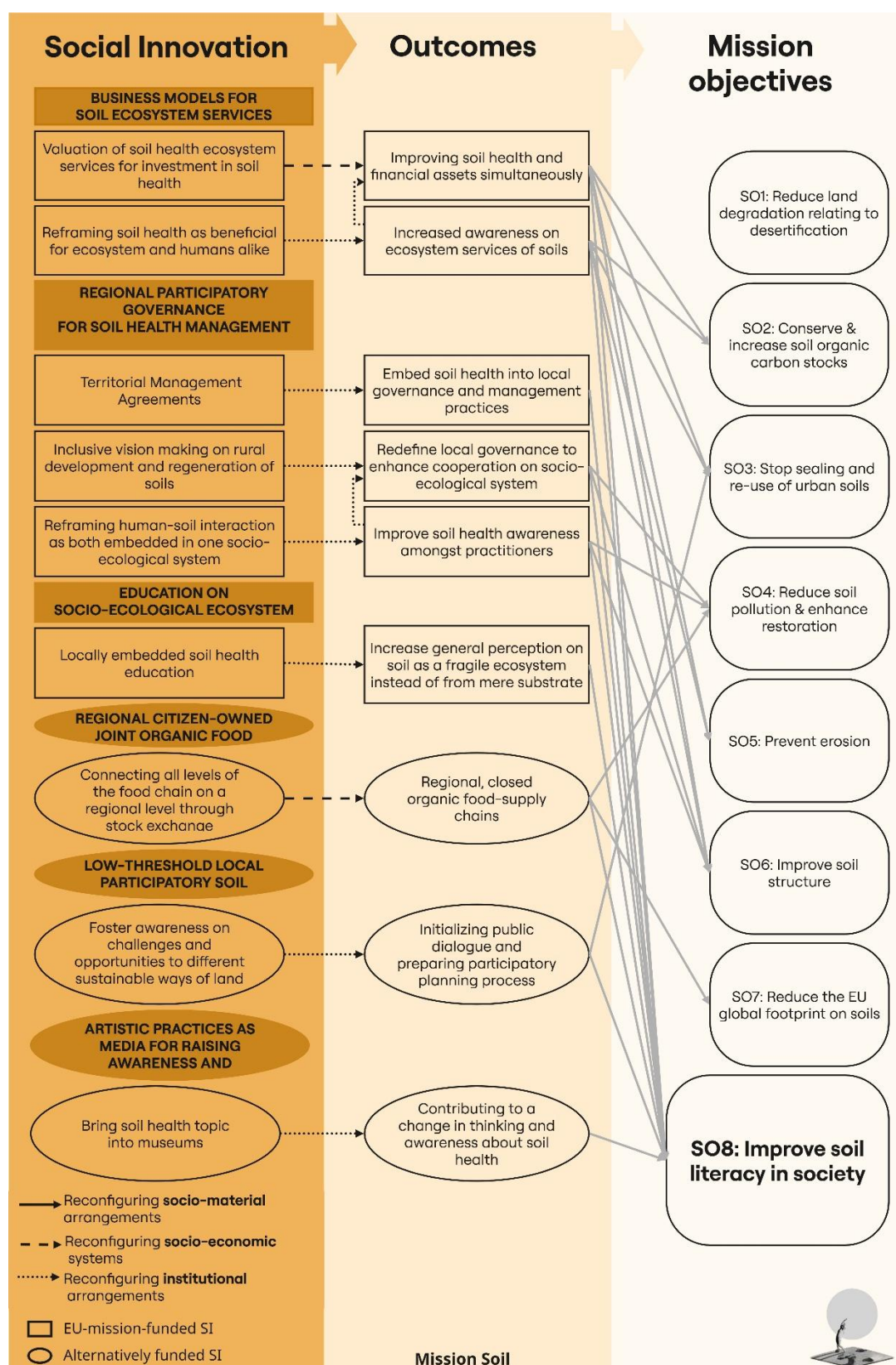


FIGURE 10: SI IMPACT PATHWAYS IN RELATION TO THE SOIL MISSION

3.6 SI IMPACT PATHWAYS IN RELATION TO MISSION CANCER



SOCIETAL CHALLENGE AND MISSION GOAL AND OBJECTIVES

The Mission 'Cancer' addresses cancer as a major and growing societal challenge that puts immense pressure on health systems, limiting who can access diagnosis or treatment on time. The Mission seeks to improve the lives of more than 3 million people by 2030 through prevention, cure and for those affected by cancer, including their families, to live longer and better. The Mission challenge, goals and SOs are shown in Figure 11 below.

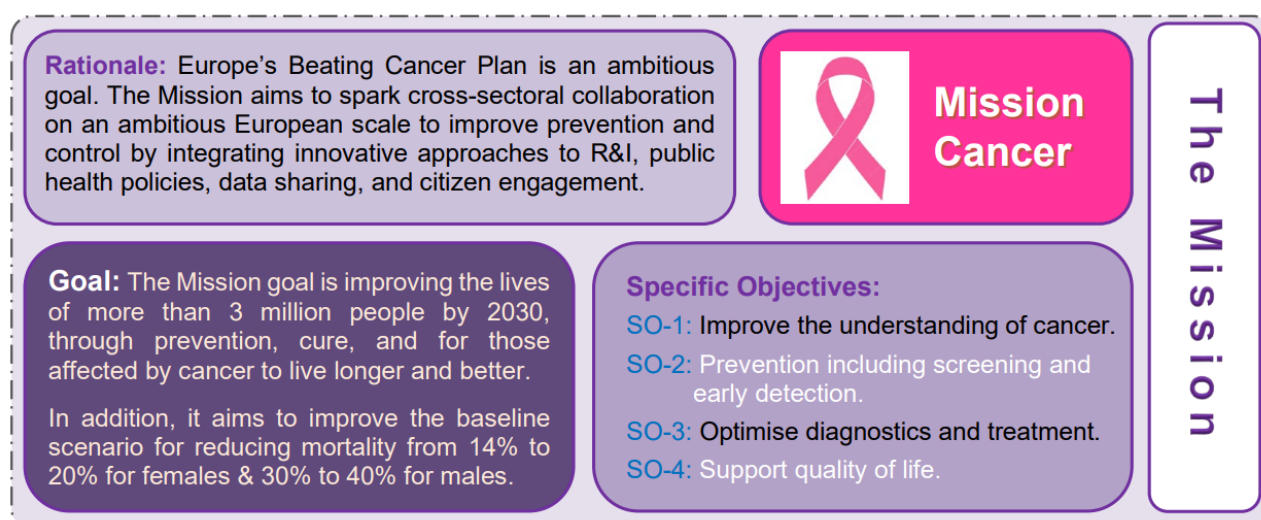


FIGURE 11: MISSION CANCER (SOURCE: EUROPEAN COMMISSION, 2024)

SOCIAL INNOVATIONS, OUTCOMES, & CONTRIBUTION TO MISSION OBJECTIVES

The database review identified four SIIPs in relation to the Cancer Mission harnessed through both EU-Mission-funded and alternatively funded projects (see Figure 12). Of the four SIs, two were identified in EU-Mission-funded projects and two in both EU-Mission-funded projects and alternatively funded projects. The SIs revolve around new forms of cancer-relevant research and expertise, governance, and the integration of support practices and technology.

EU-Mission-funded and alternatively funded SIs

SI 1: Bottom-up cancer prevention governance focusses on local activities surrounding the primary prevention of cancer. The impact pathway comprises two practices. The first practice identified through a EU-Mission-funded SI sets up local cancer prevention expert councils; shifting responsibility for primary prevention measures from the national to the local level. The second practice identified through an alternatively funded SI focuses on lobbying activities for a regulatory change to reduce air pollution. The outcomes of these practices result in increased primary prevention engagement by citizens and local authorities as well as, through the second practice, improved air quality due to measures taken. The SI, thus, primarily contributes to SO2 on *prevention including screening and early detection*. Through the set-up of the local prevention expert councils more targeted knowledge about risk factors hindering primary prevention is generated, thus, contributing to SO2 in *preventing cancer* in an encompassing manner. The SI operates primarily through

Box 9 – Bottom-up cancer prevention governance

Improving air quality contributes to prevention of cancer through reducing carcinogens, while also reducing the emission of CO₂-equivalents to accelerate the transition to carbon neutrality. The Polish Smog Alert (PAS) is an example of a civic initiative contributing to improvement of air quality. Through lobbying for regulatory change, the PAS aims to reduce the use of conventional households heating practices. The initiative empowers civil society to pressure policymakers, while also advocating concrete governance innovations to achieve the desired targets.

reconfiguring institutional arrangements shifting the responsibility for implementing primary prevention to the local level.

SI 2: Integrated, long-term psycho-socio-medical care for patients, families and caregivers tackles challenges arising in relation to the fragmentation of private and professional health and care systems. The two associated practices focus on (i) changing practices of psycho-social aftercare for cancer survivors and their families and (ii) on connecting health and social systems in cancer care governance. Through this, the SI breaks up silo-thinking and identifies leeway to improve the quality of life of patients and survivors contributing to the SO4: *support quality of life* (see Box 10). Thereby, it

Box 10 – Integrated, long-term psycho-socio-medical care for patients, families and caregivers

The e-Quol project brings together a panel of cancer survivors and researchers that together identify the needs of young cancer survivors and their families and caregivers. The lived experiences of these young cancer survivors and their network is central in defining the unmet needs of long-term after-care. Already existing applications with advice for physical health care after a successful treatment of cancer are supplemented with broader advice on treatment-induced late health effects and psychosocial challenges. Specific attention is paid to challenges related to the age group, such as the effect of cancer on self-image and sexuality in the already challenging phase of puberty. The psycho-social app is not an end in itself, but a means of aggregating all lived experiences and tools found through the participatory approach of the project.

More information: <https://equolproject.eu/> and Zirngiebl et al. (2025)

reconfigures institutional arrangements bringing together actors from different areas of life of patients and survivors.

EU-Mission-funded SIs

SI 3: Patients as experts on their disease is a SI primarily addressing the design and implementation of research and innovation processes in the Cancer Mission. The associated practice focusses on the set up of co-creative research formats that engage patients and survivors and medical experts alike. Through these changes enabling a co-creative process neglected symptoms and long-term effects of cancer can be detected and prioritized in (after-)care. Through reconfiguring norms and values determining who is regarded as an expert might indirectly contribute to SO3: *optimize diagnostics and treatments* by identifying symptoms and the design of adequate practices for long-term treatment and after-care eventually contribute to SO4: *support quality of life*.

SI 4: Patient-managed socio-technical healthcare network centres on the integration of patients' and survivors' need and app-based approaches. It reshapes cancer care as a lifelong focus on quality of life with the integration of technological tools. Through the usage and set-up of personalized apps cancer care is reshaped as a lifelong focus on the quality of life, where healthcare does not stop after cancer treatment is terminated. Reconfiguring socio-material and institutional arrangements by co-creating an app tailored to the need of patients and their families, the SI contributes to SO4: *support quality of life*.

SI ROLE IN THE CANCER MISSION

Taken together, the identified pathways suggest that SI contributes to the Cancer Mission primarily by transforming governance processes, breaking up silos in care and changing health-care-patient relationships. Institutional reconfiguration emerges as the dominant impact domain with many pathways creating new forms of collaboration that broaden the variety of actors involved setting up measures for primary prevention and deciding on adequate care practices. Together the EU-Mission-funded SIs and Alternatively funded SIs show that the reconfiguration of norms and values is another valuable impact domain, with many pathways showing the importance of making the voices and needs of patients and survivors heard.

The pathways contribute primarily to SO2 and SO4. These two objectives focus less on biomedical discovery — where techno-scientific approaches dominate — and more on how care is organised, how responsibility is distributed, and whose knowledge counts. The SIs contributing to SO2: *prevention including screening and early detection* focus on widening responsibilities for primary prevention to local policy-makers and communities. The pathways' contribution to SO4 *support quality of life* is mainly tackled through integrating patients and survivors as co-researchers and designing support practices in a personalized manner. One pathway also contributes to SO3 by enhancing understanding of symptoms of and treatment options for cancer through participatory research. No pathway focuses

on SO1, as this objective is centred around expert research defining the risk factors for the development of cancer.

Overall, the identified pathways suggest that SI enable the opening of research and innovation processes within the Cancer Mission and demonstrate the value by applying newly generated insights in public policy measures and after treatment care.

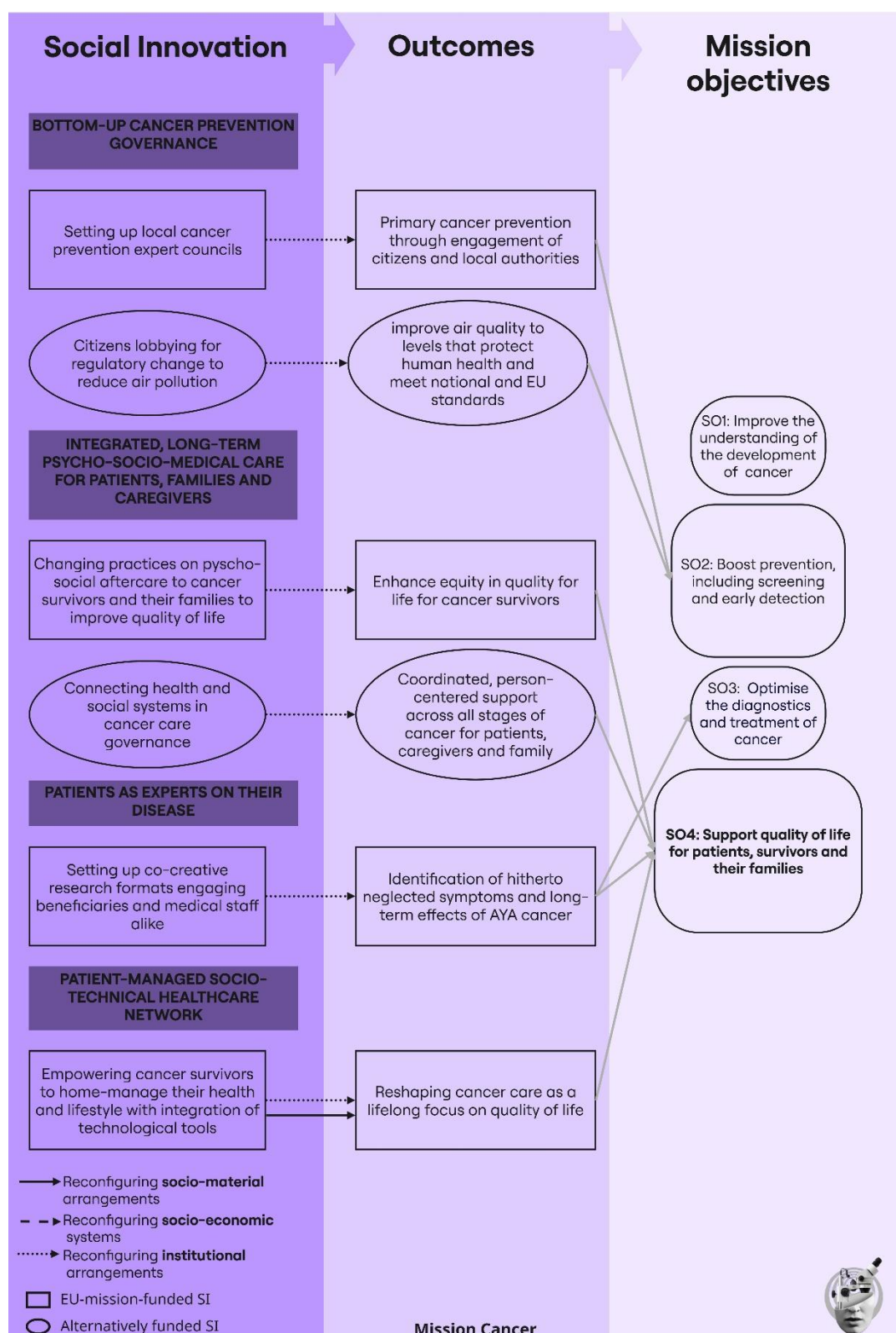


FIGURE 12: SI IMPACT PATHWAYS IN RELATION TO THE CANCER MISSION

3.7 SI CONTRIBUTION ACROSS MISSIONS

The preceding sections traced SI impact pathways within each of the five EU Missions individually. This synthesis section brings together cross-cutting insights that recur across the Missions and discusses what they reveal about the role of SI in the five EU Missions and in MOIP more broadly.

Nine types of pathways through which SIs contribute to Mission objectives are identified: A grouping by the focus area of the innovative practice of the SIs identified from all EU-Mission-funded projects, along with examples of SIs from alternatively funded projects led us to nine key pathway types that can be categorised under the three impact domains²⁶ including: governance and institutional domain (actor engagement and governance processes; knowledge co-production; monitoring and assessment processes; awareness and behavioural change); socio-economic domain (business models and financing mechanisms; service ecosystems; livelihood and wellbeing) and socio-material domain (planning, [re]structuring the built and natural environment) (see Table 5). These pathway types illustrate the breadth of practices currently mobilised toward Mission goals and objectives. It holds insights for actors (incl. policy actors, SI funders and investors, as well as practitioners) who are interested in understanding the various ways through which SI contributes to these goals and objectives.

TABLE 5: PREDOMINANT PATHWAY TYPES ACROSS THE 5 EU MISSIONS

Pathway type	Cities	Oceans	CCA	Soil	Cancer
Governance & institutional arrangements					
Actor engagement & governance processes	SI 2	SI 1 SI 2 SI 3	SI 1 SI 2	SI 2 SI 5	SI 1 SI 1
Knowledge co-production	SI 1		SI 1		SI 3
Monitoring & assessment process		SI 5			
Awareness & behaviour		SI 6	SI 1	SI 1 SI 3 SI 6	SI 1 SI 1
Socio-economic systems					
Business models & financing mechanisms	SI 5	SI 7	SI 3	SI 1 SI 4	

²⁶ These groupings reflect the domain in which each pathway's effects are most pronounced, but they are not mutually exclusive.

Pathway type	Cities	Oceans	CCA	Soil	Cancer
Service ecosystems (e.g., healthcare)					SI 2 SI 4 SI 2
Livelihood & wellbeing			SI 5 SI 6		
Socio-material arrangements					
Planning (cities, regions)	SI 1 SI 3		SI 1	SI 2	
Structuring the built & natural environment	SI 4 SI 4 SI 5		SI 4		

The SIs in green are from EU-Mission-funded projects, while those in red are from alternatively funded projects.

EU-Mission-funded projects prominently focus their SI efforts on innovating governance arrangements, particularly actor engagement and governance processes. A cross-review of the pathway types, the associated SIs, and their origins — whether from EU-Mission-funded or alternatively funded projects — illustrates that SI is being deployed for initiating new forms of governance that are relevant for Mission implementation. These SIs constitute new ways of engaging actors and organising governance processes, connecting previously separated actors through novel forms of participation and coalition, such as bottom-up cancer prevention governance (Cancer); new ways of co-producing knowledge, in which experiential, local, and scientific knowledge are brought together so that who counts as a knowledge-holder is itself redefined, as when patients become co-researchers on their own disease (Cancer); new ways of monitoring and assessment, in which citizens and communities become active participants in environmental and social monitoring (Oceans); and new ways of shifting norms, values, and behaviours in relation to Mission challenges, for instance in the case of information-driven change in seafood consumption (Oceans). The importance of this focus is significant. A foundational principle behind MOIP relates to engaging actors across the quadruple helix (Mazzucato, 2018). Hence, SIs in this pathway type contribute towards this central ambition of MOIP.

SI is more than co-creation and participatory engagement: While EU-Mission-funded, and some alternatively funded projects fill a key implementation requirement in MOIP of developing mission-fitting forms of actor engagement and broader governance processes (Larrue, 2021), our analysis illustrates the additional ways through which SI potentially contributes to Mission goals and objectives.

In the socio-economic domain, through introducing new business models and financing arrangements that reshape economic incentives and value in line with Mission objectives (e.g., Oceans SI7 — buy-out based conservation finance or establishment of carbon markets in Soil SI1); new service ecosystems that reorganise healthcare, mobility, and

energy provision around user needs and community logics, taking the example of integrated long-term psycho-social care for patients and families (Cancer); and new arrangements for livelihood and wellbeing that create green employment, foster social inclusion, and strengthen community resilience, for example inclusive employment in green jobs and sociocratic sustainable community living (Climate).

In the *socio-material domain*, SIs emerge around new ways of planning that embed sustainability, participation, and climate considerations into processes shaping urban and regional environments, for instance in the case of sustainability-centred participatory urban planning (Cities) or Territorial Management Agreements (Soil); and new ways of structuring the built and natural environment that alter infrastructures, land use, and human-nature relationships, prefiguring alternative material futures — such as the case of waste management as a socially embedded resource circulation system (Cities, Climate).

This finding illustrates the additional potential for SI to contribute to Mission objectives. By showing these different pathway types, it also illuminates the ways through which SI contributes to societal impact, which are useful beyond the five EU Missions.

SI role differs by the structure of Mission objectives: SI appears to be most leveraged in relation to Mission objectives that explicitly consider social and/or societal aspects. This is most vivid in relation to the Climate Adaptation and the Cancer Missions where no SIs could be identified to contribute to both of their SOIs, which focus primarily on generating scientific knowledge and evidence on climate risks and cancer development, respectively. In contrast, Mission objectives that seek to actively engage actors were related to various SIs. Similarly, SIs were more likely to contribute to multiple objectives within broadly defined Mission SOs (as in the case of the Oceans and Waters Missions) compared to more specifically defined Mission SOs like Cities. This finding suggests that to tap into the potential of SI for Mission implementation, the way the objectives are defined is critical. Including SI and social considerations, more broadly, is likely to increase SI stimulation and role in a given Mission. Hence in the upcoming FP10, it becomes critical to explicitly include the social dimension.

EU-Mission-funded projects focus on broad-scale integration across actors and systems, while alternatively funded projects zoom in on systems: EU-Mission-funded projects tend to favour breadth, which could come at a cost of depth. Alternatively funded SIs tend to dive deeper into intra-system transformation: e.g., decentralised energy in relation to objectives of the Cities Mission, and financial/economic mechanisms in relation to the objectives of the Oceans and Waters Mission. They show where SI contributes beyond cross-system governance, into the socio-economic and socio-material reconfiguration of specific systems. The same pattern likely explains why livelihood and wellbeing pathways appeared mainly in alternatively funded projects: a division of labour across funding instruments, with streams such as ESF²⁷ concentrating on livelihoods and

²⁷ European Social Fund Plus. It is the European Union's main funding instrument for investing in people and social development.

wellbeing while the Missions pursue broader themes. These are the domains future Mission calls and funders could deliberately invest in.

4. CONCLUSION

In this catalogue, we sought to respond to two key questions: *1) What is the current state of integration of SI across EU Missions and how can this be done more effectively? 2) What are the impact pathways through which SIs contribute to the EU Missions?* We found this to be an important pursuit at this particular point in time for two key reasons. First, the persistent urgency to address grand societal challenges such as climate change and biodiversity loss, whose adverse impacts on the planet may be irreversible if they go unattended, and which require transformations in the social as well as the technological domains. Second, the current de-prioritisation of social dimensions in dominant policy framings of these challenges, in favour of technical and technological solutions. Against this backdrop, the catalogue illustrates the role of SI in addressing the societal goals set out in the EU Missions, as well as broader societal challenges that may be enshrined in future missions.

This catalogue contributes to this objective through two key analyses. We have examined the way SI is currently embedded within the EU Missions programming cycle and have drawn on that analysis to postulate suggestions on how SI can be more strongly integrated to fully leverage its transformative potential (Chapter 2). We have also traced how SIs — characterised by new practices, social relations, organisational forms, and institutional arrangements that address societal challenges in new ways — contributes to Mission objectives and goals, via their actual or potential outcomes in society, in what we refer to as SI impact pathways (Chapter 3).

Through these analyses, we find that SI is included within the EU Missions but that this inclusion is uneven across the five Missions and unsystematically embedded within particular Missions — with the partial exception of the Cities Mission. Where it is included, SI is largely included in its relation to new forms of organising actor engagement and collaboration. While crucial, since a core objective of the Missions is to mobilise diverse actors in responding to the addressed societal challenges, this focus underleverages SI's transformative role in other domains, including in the socio-material (how society relates to its natural and built environment) and socio-economic (how society relates to systems of production, consumption, exchange, and value creation) domains. For instance, in the form of new ways of planning and redesigning cities and regions toward climate neutrality and resilience or in the form of new business models that value ecosystem services. The constructed SI impact pathways (SIIPs) illustrate how multiple SIs in EU-Mission-funded as well as alternatively funded projects contribute to the objectives of the five Missions across all three domains. These pathways provide insight on the ways SI contributes to Mission goals and objectives. For policymakers, funders, (social) innovators and business support organisations, it offers a map of which pathways are currently harnessed in a given Mission area, which carry potential but remain underused, and where investment in SI might therefore be directed.

Moreover, findings on the contribution of SI to the five EU Missions provides insights into its broader role in relation to MOIP. The findings relating to SI's notable contribution to initiating new and reshaping governance and institutional arrangements underlying practices in domains such as mobility, food, healthcare indicate its crucial role in any mission with transformative intent. Achieving such missions is often contingent on reshaping governance and institutional arrangements, including by mobilising actors in the quadruple helix, a task for which technological innovation is not suited on its own. Moreover, the catalogue also illustrates SI contributing to reshaping socio-material relations and socio-economic arrangements which are equally central to the transformative change pursued in missions.

The following key takeaways from our findings relate specifically to new approaches and measures that should be adopted by R&I policy to strengthen the role, application and impact of social innovation in mission-oriented R&I and its operationalisation, with the aim of achieving more sustainable outcomes from the interventions put in place.

Key takeaways and implications for R&I policy

1. Integrate social innovation into the strategic programming of Missions

Social innovation should be considered when Mission challenges, objectives and expected outcomes are defined, rather than being introduced only during project implementation. Mission programming should assess not only which technological developments are required, but also which changes in practices, social relations, organisational forms and institutional arrangements are necessary to achieve the intended transformation. Earlier integration would reduce the risk of social innovation being used primarily to facilitate the uptake or acceptance of predesigned technological solutions.

2. Use the social innovation impact pathways (SIIPs) as a programming and portfolio-management framework

The identified social innovation impact pathways can support the design, implementation and review of Mission portfolios. Programme designers can use them to identify which forms of societal change are required for particular Mission objectives, assess whether these pathways are adequately represented across call topics, funded projects and identify areas that remain underused. The pathways can also provide a common framework for formulating calls, assessing portfolio contributions, structuring monitoring activities and supporting learning across projects and Missions.

3. Extend the scope of social innovation beyond participation and co-creation

Mission programmes should continue to support participatory governance, actor engagement and knowledge co-production, but should not treat these as the full extent of social innovation. Calls and programmes should also enable social innovations that reshape socio-economic and socio-material systems, including new business and financing models, service ecosystems, livelihood arrangements, planning practices, land-use models and relationships with the built and natural environment. Explicitly recognising these contributions would enable Missions to address a broader range of conditions underlying transformative change.

4. Refer to social innovation explicitly in calls, project selection and monitoring

While explicit tagging of SI does not always directly result in its uptake in mission activities, it increases its chances as project proposals are shaped by topic and call texts. Where relevant, work programmes and calls should connect social innovation explicitly to Mission objectives, expected outcomes and impacts. Evaluation criteria should assess the credibility of proposed social innovation pathways, and evaluation panels should include appropriate SSH and social innovation expertise. Monitoring frameworks should subsequently capture changes in practices, relationships, organisational arrangements and institutions, rather than focusing only on technological outputs or participation figures.

5. Provide appropriate conditions for experimentation, implementation and amplification

Social innovations require time, resources and regulatory space to be developed, tested and adapted within specific contexts. Mission programmes should therefore provide suitable implementation mechanisms, such as pilot projects, testbeds, regulatory experimentation, flexible grants and cascade funding. They should also support the adaptation, replication and amplification of promising approaches, including connections to relevant public authorities, intermediaries, investors and alternative sources of blended finance instruments that contribute to moving from experimentation to institutionalisation. These mechanisms should preserve sufficient flexibility for local and sectoral actors while maintaining alignment with broader Mission objectives.

While the insights presented in this report primarily focus on SI as an innovation addressing societal challenges, future work could also examine SI as a redesign of the innovation process itself (also see Zirngiebl et al., 2025). From this perspective, the participatory, cross-sectoral and experimental governance arrangements associated with MOIP may themselves represent socially innovative changes in how research and innovation are organised. Examining these arrangements through an SI lens could provide further insights into their effects on participation, power relations, institutional practices and transformative capacity. The catalogue provides a conceptual and empirical basis for advancing this broader analysis of SI impact within missions and mission-oriented innovation policy.

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