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WORKING PAPER

Social Economy Policy of the City of Laval, Quebec:
Development Process, Content and Dynamics

Tassadit ZERDANI, Maricaret Merino, Olivier CORBIN-CHARLAND,
Isabeau FOUR, Eva MURITH, Charles GAGNÉ-FOURNIER, Louise HODDER
(Quebec, Canada)

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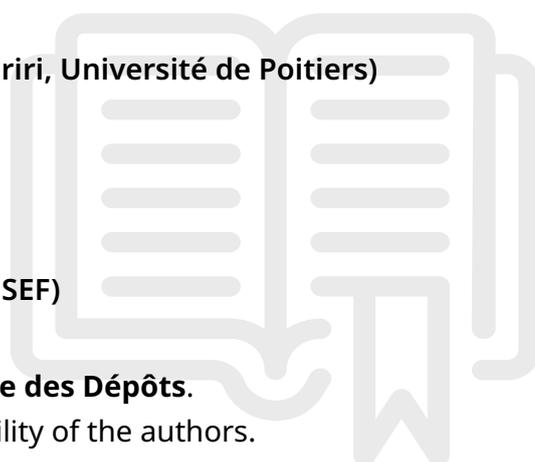
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Social Economy Policy of the City of Laval, Quebec: Development Process, Content and Dynamics¹

This research document was prepared by the team at the Centre d'étude en responsabilité sociale et écocitoyenneté (CÉRSÉ)² whose members are:

Tassadit ZERDANI, researcher and knowledge transfer consultant
Maricarmen MERINO, faculty member at Cégep de Rosemont and researcher
Olivier CORBIN-CHARLAND, researcher and knowledge transfer consultant
Isabeau FOUR, researcher and Director of CÉRSÉ

In collaboration with this team from the Pôle régional de l'économie sociale de Laval (PRESL)³, the organization responsible for developing the Social Economy Policy for the City of Laval:

Eva MURITH, strategic advisor for the development of Laval's social economy policy
Charles GAGNÉ-FOURNIER, territorial development advisor
Louise HODDER, General Manager

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¹ Translated from French: ZERDANI, T., MERINO M., CORBIN-CHARLAND, O., FOUR, I., MURITH, E., GAGNÉ-FOURNIER, C., HODDER, L., « Politique d'économie sociale de la Ville de Laval au Québec », *Politiques locales d'ESS au service de la transition socio-écologique*, GSEF, 2025.

² See more at the CÉRSÉ website: <https://cerse.crosemont.qc.ca/equipe/>

³ See more at the CÉRSÉ website: <https://www.economiesocialelaval.com/>

Introduction

Context

There are multiple crises currently (climate crisis, housing crisis, inflation, etc.), and they require us to rethink our approaches to economic and social development at the territorial level. Many challenges are exacerbated by these crises: food insecurity, the lack of affordable housing, depopulated areas, and so on. These examples are challenges that require, to address them, reconsidering and valuing the contribution of new entrepreneurial models, such as the social economy (SE) model. This model, which generally has a dual social and economic objective, contributes to efforts to strengthen an economy based on the values of solidarity and sharing. As highlighted in the European Commission's reflection paper "Towards a Sustainable Europe by 2030," the SE is a driving force for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at European and global level, in particular Goal 8 which aims to "promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work."⁴

Municipal administrations, based on the principle of proximity, bear primary responsibility for developing practices adapted to the realities of development within their territories (Simard, 2016). Sustainable territorial development (STD) has specific characteristics and is distinguished by "this desire to conceive a development model that can reconcile economic opportunities with environmental constraints and social expectations" (Jean, 2015: 120). Furthermore, this type of development adopts a participatory territorial governance model that values and combines leadership, empowerment, innovation, social mobilization, consultation, and partnership (Laplante and Simard, 2013).

Given the complexity of the challenges of STD and its demands that involve the mobilization of various social actors (Laplante and Simard, 2013), the participation of social economy enterprises (SEEs) is essential, as they are recognized for their territorial roots and social impact. Indeed, these enterprises contribute to the vitality of their territories and represent a lever for dynamic and sustainable economic and social development (Bouchard, 2011), since they respond to the needs and challenges that emerge in their territories and are accountable to their local communities (Simard, 2016). Furthermore, in its white paper on the future of municipalities (2012), the Union of Quebec Municipalities (UMQ) emphasizes that "the cooperative sector and the social economy sector are two strategic allies of municipal action due to their structuring effect within the community". The president of the Chantier de l'économie sociale du Québec stated that "for the municipal sector, choosing the social economy as a development tool and planning strategy is a guarantee of inclusion, innovation and resilience for the regional economy and the vitality of the territories" (press release of the Chantier de l'économie sociale, September 2021).⁵

⁴ European Commission website: https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/sustainable-development-goals_en?wt-search=yes&prefLang=fr. Accessed on September 14, 2024.

⁵ See the press release [online]: <https://chantier.qc.ca/communiqués-de-presse/le-chantier-de-leconomie-sociale-reclame-des-engagements-en-economie-sociale/>. Accessed on February 27, 2024.

For their part, cities and municipalities, as local governments, are on the front line in addressing these numerous interconnected challenges (social, economic and environmental). They are the most affected by the ongoing issues that arise within their territories. It is worth noting that historically, cities and municipalities have often been at the forefront of the implementation of policies aimed at supporting their communities and citizens through SEEs.

This contextualization illustrates the complexity of the challenges of STD and the need for cities/municipalities to develop innovative solutions co-developed with SEEs recognized for their business models focused on the collective interest and the common good. It is therefore important to examine how these cities/municipalities could better value the contribution of the SE and collaborate more effectively with actors in this sector to develop sustainable solutions to contemporary challenges.

Interest in and a willingness to help and support the SE are beginning to emerge in Quebec. The last municipal elections, in November 2022, brought to power a new generation of mayors whose ideas and values resonate with those of the SE. Among them is the current mayor of Laval, who highlighted the sector's contribution during his election campaign. It is within this electoral context that a mobilization movement has emerged around the development of a Social Economy Policy (SEP) for the City of Laval. This movement is led by the Pôle régional d'économie sociale de Laval (PRESL), a non-profit organization acting as a central hub for the SE ecosystem in Laval. In May 2023, this mobilization materialized with the announcement by the economic development service of the City of Laval (hereinafter referred to as Laval Économique) that it was entrusting PRESL with the mandate to develop a SEP.⁶

Indeed, the SEP of the City of Laval was developed by PRESL in collaboration with representatives from its economic development department, Laval Économique. It was then submitted to the various city departments for approval. After review, adaptation and alignment with Laval Économique's internal terminology and general objectives, the documents outlining this policy and its action plan were presented to the City of Laval's Executive Committee in June 2024. The SEP was adopted by City Council on November 5, 2024 (agenda item 11.63). It was launched and made public on November 25, 2024, during the SE month.⁷

Objectives and methodology

⁶ Pôle régional d'économie sociale de Laval – *Portrait 2018* [online]: <https://www.economiesocialelaval.com/politique-deconomie-sociale/>. Accessed on October 15, 2024.

⁷ Laval Économique (November 2024). *Politique de l'économie sociale – Ville de Laval* [online]: <https://lavaleconomique.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/politique-economie-sociale-2024.pdf>. Accessed on November 26, 2024.

This research article, developed by researchers from the Centre d'étude en responsabilité sociale et écocitoyenneté (CÉRSÉ), with the collaboration of the team in charge of developing the SEP at PRESL, aims to offer feedback intended for actors in the SE and other municipalities wishing to develop a SEP. It presents a testimony along with an analysis of the content and development process of this public policy. More specifically, this document attempts to answer the following research question: *What strategies and tools are put in place to defend and try to converge the different visions and objectives of the actors from different sectors working together on the development of the SEP of the City of Laval?*

To answer this question and achieve the main purpose of this work, several data sources were used:

- 1) Review of documents shared by the team responsible for developing the SEP at PRESL and publications on the state of the ES in the City of Laval.
- 2) Participant observation by two researchers from CÉRSÉ within the Practitioners' Committee, a group of external experts who contributed to the development of the SEP, as well as during the five preparatory workshops organized as part of the governance of this policy. These workshops brought together elected officials, public servants, practitioners, business leaders, and PRESL employees.
- 3) Data from six interviews conducted with two officials from Laval Économique, including one with the Commissioner for the ES, the Director of PRESL, the SEP Project Manager at PRESL, and two interviews with the elected official responsible for the ES in Laval.

The collected data were organized and analyzed using NVivo word processing software. Analysis categories were defined according to the objectives of this article. The analysis results were validated by the PRESL team, as the article was written in collaboration with them.

To better understand the guidelines of the SEP and the creation process, Section 1 of this article introduces the context, characteristics and profile of the SE in Laval. Sections 2 and 3 then explain the political will and mobilization process that preceded the development of the SEP, the phases of development of this policy and its action plan, as well as the institutional framework and the actors involved, considering the different visions of the SE held by these actors.

1. The social economy sector in Laval: current situation

1.1. Statistical profile, characteristics and actors of the SE in Laval

1.1.1. Characteristics

According to a 2018 study conducted by MCE-Conseils for PRESL⁸, the creation of new SEEs in Laval has stagnated since the early 2000s. However, during this period, several other types of peripheral organizations emerged, such as community organizations that offer services on an ad-hoc and volunteer basis. PRESL attributes this to the fact that the support ecosystem for the SE sector in Laval focused, during this period, on consolidating existing SEEs rather than starting new ones. However, since 2017, PRESL and other actors in the SE ecosystem have been working more actively to foster the emergence of new SEEs (cooperatives and non-profit organizations (NPOs)).

This observation is also highlighted in the report of the Institut de la Statistique du Québec (ISQ, 2019). According to the data published in this report, which compares different regions of Quebec, SEEs are significantly underrepresented⁹ in Laval; it is the region with the fewest. This is one of the reasons that motivated the City of Laval to adopt a SEP with the aim of increasing the number of SEEs within its territory and addressing the underrepresentation of this type of enterprises. The SEP will enable the deployment of more SE projects in various sectors of activity, which could help address the challenges of sustainable socio-economic development in the region.¹⁰

Other distinctive features of the SE sector of Laval are highlighted in the ISQ report (2019, p 171). In summary, Laval is the administrative region where:

- a) There are many large SEEs (about a dozen) with annual revenues exceeding CAD \$10 million.
- b) The proportion of non-profit organizations (NPOs) is higher (85%) than in Quebec's overall SE sector (75%).
- c) The proportion of SEEs pursuing a social purpose in education, training or childcare is also higher (21%) than in Quebec as a whole (16%).
- d) Most SEEs operate in the health and social services sector (personal services), and in the environmental, manufacturing, food, financial services, arts and culture sectors, etc.¹¹
- e) In order of importance, the main sectors of activity for SEEs are education, training and childcare (approximately 60 enterprises); health and living conditions

⁸ Laval Regional Social Economy Hub. *L'économie sociale à Laval – Portrait 2018* [Online] https://www.economiesocialelaval.com/nouveausite/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/PRESL02_%C3%89tat-des-lieux-ESAC-Laval-ES_FINAL_avec-annexes-amend%C3%A9-Final.pdf. Accessed on October 15, 2024.

⁹ ISQ (2019). *L'économie sociale au Québec – Portrait statistique* [online]: <https://statistique.quebec.ca/fr/fichier/economie-sociale-au-quebec-portrait-statistique-2016.pdf>. Accessed on October 15, 2024.

¹⁰ Laval Social Economy Policy (2024)

¹¹ *L'économie sociale à Laval – Portrait 2018* by MCE-Conseils, on the PRESL website.

(approximately 50); recreation and tourism (approximately 40); housing (approximately 40); and arts, culture and media (approximately 30).¹²

The sectoral characteristics of Laval's SE discussed above show that most SEEs operating in this territory are involved in sectors with a strong social rather than economic focus. It is therefore important to support the emergence of SEEs in other sectors with a more economic orientation: retail, industry, housing, food processing, etc. The SEP could encourage structuring investments in these higher-risk sectors.

1.1.2. Statistical profile

The contribution of Laval's SEEs to the city's economic development is demonstrated by data presented in the ISQ report (2019). The city has 270 SEEs, 227 of which are NPOs.¹³ These NPOs include work integration enterprises, sheltered workshops, and solidarity cooperatives.¹⁴ These enterprises contributed to the creation of 5,002 jobs, 3,147 of which are full-time. Together, they generate a total revenue of \$548 million. The proportion of enterprises less than 10 years old is 12%, indicating the permanence of most SEEs.

The study conducted by MCE-Conseils provides further data demonstrating the SE sector's contribution to Laval's overall economic activity. It highlights that the SE sector represents 4.1% of Laval's GDP, 1.5% of revenues, and 4.9% of jobs in the entire SE in Quebec. Laval's SEEs pay their workers an average of \$33,000 per year. This average is affected by the high proportion of part-time work and the level of education required for employment, generally lower in the SE compared to other economic sectors.

To catch up with the SE average of Quebec average, the MCE-Conseils study recommends increasing the revenues generated by SEEs in Laval. It is therefore important to create new ones and support the growth and scaling up of existing ones in the territory.

1.1.3. Main actors

The mobilization around the SEP is conclusive in Laval because the SE ecosystem in this city is composed of diverse actors, and the pivotal point of this ecosystem is PRESL. PRESL is one of the 19 regional hubs established by Quebec's *Chantier de l'économie sociale* to ensure the development of the SE in all regions of Quebec. Indeed, PRESL's mission is to promote and develop the SE sector in the Laval region. It has the status of a non-profit organization

¹² ISQ (2019). *L'économie sociale au Québec – Portrait statistique 2016* [online]: <https://statistique.quebec.ca/fr/fichier/economie-sociale-au-quebec-portrait-statistique-2016.pdf>. Accessed on October 15, 2024.

¹³ Institut de la statistique du Québec (2019). *Portrait de l'ÉS sociale au Québec en 2016* (p. 12).

¹⁴ *L'économie sociale à Laval – Portrait 2018* by MCE Conseils, accessed on PRESL's website on October 15, 2024.

(NPO) and its membership is primarily composed of social economy enterprises.¹⁵ To fulfill its mission, PRESL works in consultation and collaboration with various types of partners involved in socio-economic development in Laval, including:

- a) The Commissioner for the ES at Laval Économique;
- b) Numerous departments of the City of Laval, particularly Laval Économique, which provides support to enterprises, including SSEs, and Laval's Department of Culture, Recreation, Sports and Social Development;
- c) Laval's elected officials, particularly the city councilor responsible for the SE section;
- d) The Collective Entrepreneurship Fund (FEC, *Fonds entrepreneuriat collectif*) Committee, dedicated to financing SSEs;
- e) The Laval Social Innovation Lab¹⁶, conceptualized and implemented by PRESL in collaboration with Coop L'Ilot¹⁷;
- f) The Quebec Regional Development Cooperative – Montreal-Laval Office; La Ruche Laval; the Laval Solidarity Fund; the 270 SSEs operating in the territory of Laval;
- g) Community action organizations; Laval community organizers; and the various local roundtables.

According to a recent study by PRESL, other actors are also part of Laval's SE ecosystem. Depending on the enterprises' area of activity, partnerships have been developed with: Laval Innov; Culture Laval; the Laval Integrated Health and Social Services Centre (CISSS Laval, *Centre intégré de santé et de services sociaux de Laval*); the Youth Employment Centre (CJE, *Carrefour jeunesse-emploi*), etc. National organizations such as the Quebec Regional Development Cooperative (CDRQ, *Coopérative de développement régional du Québec*) also contribute their expertise to support Laval's SSEs and contribute to the development of the Laval ecosystem. Technical assistance is also available from consulting organizations such as MCE-Conseils.

To conclude this brief overview, it should be noted that the SE is also very present within the Laval entrepreneurial community, particularly during the activities of its youth wing.

1.1.4. Examples of flagship projects

To demonstrate the contribution and added value of the ES to Laval's territorial development, we felt it was important to mention some concrete projects cited as examples by those interviewed. These projects are:

¹⁵ PRESL website. *Qui sommes-nous?* [online]: <https://www.economiesocialelaval.com/pole-regionale-2/>. Accessed on October 15, 2024.

¹⁶ This laboratory aims to be a meeting place and forum for discussion among actors with complementary goals and skills. Through processes that generate social innovation, these actors are encouraged to collaborate to address a need or challenge with innovative initiatives that have a strong social impact. For more information, see the PRESL website. The Social Innovation Laboratory [online]: <https://www.economiesocialelaval.com/lab-innovation-sociale-2/>. Accessed on October 15, 2024.

¹⁷ Coop l'Ilot website: <https://www.lilotcoop.com/laboratoire-de-solutions>

- a) Mine Urbaine: an SEE with a status of non-profit organization (NPO) that works to repurpose bulky waste and offers specialized eco-design services.
- b) Sourire solidaire: a non-profit community dental clinic whose goal is to provide access to appropriate dental care for all children in Laval. This clinic has an innovative and unique business model in Quebec.
- c) Textil'art: a non-profit training enterprise dedicated to professional and social integration. Its main mission is to promote the inclusion of people excluded from the job market by offering them their first professional experience in Quebec.
- d) Ferme Jeunes Au Travail: this SEE with NPO status is an integration enterprise that supports young people aged 16 to 35 to help them enter the job market or return to their studies.
- e) Pas à Pattes: This SEE with NPO status provides support and integration services to adults aged 21 and over with an intellectual disability or autism spectrum disorder.
- f) Collectif autour d'une tasse (CAT): another NPO that emerged from a mobilization effort that began in 2019. This collective was officially founded in February 2023. It is a group of SEEs and community organizations that collectively wish to acquire a heritage building in Laval¹⁸ and "create a village center on a human scale."
- g) LAB/Mobile¹⁹: PRESL is partnering with Carrefour jeunesse-emploi de Laval (CJEL) to establish this NPO. Its mission is to raise awareness, mobilize, develop and stimulate the participation of young Laval residents aged 16-35 in the process of creating and developing projects with social impact.

1.2. Actions or practices implemented by the City of Laval to support the SE

The City of Laval has already developed tools and practices that directly or indirectly support enterprises in the SE sector. Below, the main initiatives and actions already implemented by the city are listed by category. These actions may, however, interfere with the SEP strategy it has adopted.

1.2.1. Recognition and promotion activities

- a) Laval Économique recognizes the SE as a lever for sustainable development in the territory²⁰. It has even created a position of Commissioner for the SE.
- b) At the political level, although Quebec has had legislation on the SE since 2013, Laval is the only city in Quebec to have appointed a city councilor (elected official) responsible for the SE section. This is an important political lever for the SE in Laval.
- c) Implementation of a responsible procurement policy that favors SSEs, including the introduction of a negotiated contract policy for certain contracts under \$25,000.

¹⁸ PRESL website. *Le collectif autour d'une tasse*: <https://www.economiesocialelaval.com/collectif-autour-dune-tasse/>. Accessed on October 15, 2024.

¹⁹ PRESL website. LAB/Mobile [online]: <https://www.economiesocialelaval.com/lab-mobile/>. Accessed on October 15, 2024.

²⁰ Laval Économique website. *Entrepreneuriat collectif*: <https://lavaleconomique.com/portrait-sectoriel/entrepreneuriat-collectif/>. Accessed on October 17, 2024.

- d) The City of Laval's commitment to the SE has materialized with the funding granted to PRESL²¹ through a 3-year, \$300,000 agreement.²²
- e) Several promotional campaigns (internal and external video clips) organized by Laval Économique to raise awareness of the role and impact of the SE, and organized visits or tours of SSEs conducted jointly by representatives of the city and PRESL.

1.2.2. Support for the start-up and development of SSEs

To support the start-up and growth of SSEs, the city, through its economic development department (Laval Économique), has created the following tools:

- a) Establishment of a \$350,000 Collective Entrepreneurship Fund (CEF) dedicated entirely to financing SSEs in the form of grants; a multi-stakeholder committee has been set up to manage this fund.²³
- b) Implementation of the SSE Consolidation Program and the Place-du-Souvenir Fund dedicated to special community and SE projects.
- c) Laval Économique has hired two people dedicated to collective entrepreneurship: one full-time and one part-time.
- d) SSEs also benefit, like other traditional businesses, from financing programs in the form of loans offered by local investment funds (LIFs, *fonds locaux d'investissement*), the Laval Solidarity Fund, and the Regions and Ruralities Fund, Component 1, of the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing.
- e) Funding for the Bootcamp project and the Enracine incubator, which is a support program for collective entrepreneurship set up by PRESL to help participants validate their entrepreneurial project idea.²⁴
- f) Funding for social and community housing intended for NPOs, cooperatives or housing authorities. The Technical Resource Group provides support in this process.²⁵ Laval makes a significant contribution to the funding of social and community housing projects developed under the AccèsLogis Québec program, through several programs implemented to supplement funding from the Société d'habitation du Québec (SHQ).²⁶

²¹ PRESL has a mandate to promote the SE, to support the emergence of collective enterprises, to strengthen existing ones and to deploy a strong ecosystem.

²² City of Laval – News - Press release of May 11, 2023.

²³ This committee is mandated to make recommendations to the City's Executive Committee regarding the allocation of grants offered by this Fund. It evaluates grant applications submitted by social economy enterprises and presents its recommendations to the Executive Committee.

²⁴ PRESL website. *Découvrez votre Bootcamp*: <https://www.economiesocialelaval.com/bootcamp/>. Accessed on October 15, 2024.

²⁵ Laval City website. *Aides financières pour les OSNL, les coopératives et les offices d'habitation*: <https://www.laval.ca/Pages/Fr/Citoyens/aide-logement-social-communautaire.aspx>. Accessed on October 17, 2024.

²⁶ For example, a grant for 15% of the maximum eligible costs representing the community's basic contribution, as provided for by the AccèsLogis program, is awarded to projects receiving SHQ funding.

1.2.3. Citizen participation actions

To encourage citizens to participate in and implement collective and social projects, Laval has implemented two actions: a) the creation of a participatory budget that allows citizens to take part in public decision-making by deciding how a portion of the city's budget will be used²⁷; b) the implementation of the Regional Social Development Policy, which aims to promote social participation and living together, support local communities (neighborhoods), improve living conditions, reduce social inequalities, and adapt and promote the coherence of public policies. This policy contributes to the development of collective SE projects.

1.2.4. Partnership actions with social economy actors

The points below show examples of joint actions and interventions between Laval officials and SE actors.

- a) Direct support is offered to SEEs by Laval Économique officials in partnership with ES actors (joint funding, mentoring, SEE visits, etc.).
- b) PRESL is a member of the Collective Entrepreneurship Fund committee²⁸ and participates in the City of Laval's SE activity planning meetings.
- c) Laval has developed projects in direct partnership with SEEs. For example, three partnerships with local SE organizations (CANOPEE, PlantAction and GRAME) "to achieve its greening objectives and combat urban heat islands".²⁹ Other partnerships have also been announced with Ferme Jeunes Au Travail and La Mine Urbaine.
- d) Laval's urban planning department is an important partner in the implementation of the project *Le Village au bord de la Rivière* (Village by the River). Through the acquisition of part of the land belonging to the former novitiate of the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception, the City of Laval is laying the groundwork for a fruitful collaboration and helping to equip partners in the SE sector to bring the project to fruition.³⁰ Furthermore, it funded PRESL and Le Collectif autour d'une tasse to conduct the feasibility study.³¹

²⁷ Laval City website. *La Ville de Laval lance son 2^e budget participatif*: <https://www.laval.ca/organisation-municipale/salle-presse/communiqués-presse/budget-participatif-deuxieme-edition-lancement/>. Accessed on October 17, 2024.

²⁸ Laval City website. *Comité Fonds d'ÉS*: <https://www.laval.ca/Pages/Fr/A-propos/comite-fonds-economie-social.aspx>. Accessed on October 17, 2024.

²⁹ Laval City website: <https://www.laval.ca/Pages/Fr/Nouvelles/plantation-arbres.aspx>. Accessed on October 17, 2024.

³⁰ PRESL website. *Le collectif autour d'une tasse*: <https://www.economiesocialelaval.com/collectif-autour-dune-tasse/>. Accessed on September 15, 2024.

³¹ L'Écho de Laval. *Le collectif autour d'une tasse – Soutien majeur salué pour le projet du Village au bord de la rivière à Laval*. Published on July 22, 2025, via the newsroom [online]: <https://www.lechodelaval.ca/actualites/societe/644342/soutien-majeur-salue-pour-le-projet-du-village-au-bord-de-la-riviere-a-laval>. Accessed on July 24, 2025.

The situation described above demonstrates that the City of Laval is redoubling its efforts to encourage and support the launch and development of SSEs within its territory; several actions have already been completed or are underway. However, the challenges of sustainable development are numerous and complex. It was therefore important for elected officials, as well as actors in the SE ecosystem, to equip the City of Laval with a SEP to ensure the sustainability of these actions and guarantee the development of Laval's SE sector. The following section summarizes the added value of this SEP and its rationale.

1.3 Added value of the Social Economy Policy

Before presenting the objectives of the City of Laval's SEP, it is important to note that these objectives were modified during the development process to adapt them to the various needs of the city's internal actors. Therefore, the initial version of the SEP and its accompanying action plan, submitted by PRESL to the City of Laval, were revised and adapted to the realities of the Laval Économique department. In this article, which discusses the SEP development process, we believe it is relevant to discuss the ambition outlined in the submitted SEP document and that presented in the revised and finalized SEP document submitted by the City of Laval (the final, publicly released version).

The SEP submitted by PRESL primarily aims to highlight the contribution of the SE to Laval's socio-economic vitality and to strengthen this sector as a structuring tool enabling Laval residents to collectively address their needs and work towards the socio-ecological transition. In summary, the objectives and added value of the SEP submitted by PRESL are as follows: 1) to better understand and publicize the strengths and weaknesses of the Laval territory, existing modes of action, SE solutions to Laval's sustainable development challenges, and the SE actors operating within the territory; 2) to develop a shared vision of the SE in Laval; 3) to develop tools to raise awareness among the departments of the City of Laval about the SE as a sector that strengthens Laval's economic, social and cultural vitality, with the goal of progressively integrating the SE into various public policies.

In the final document of the SEP, the one made public, the emphasis is placed more on the desire to affirm the City of Laval's commitment to "becoming a destination recognized for its mobilizing leadership in the social economy, which supports the realization of structuring and distinctive entrepreneurial projects adapted to the Laval territory".³²

Despite the revisions made by the City of Laval for the purposes of adaptation and the development of a common language understandable by all municipal departments, the ultimate goal of developing and implementing the SEP remains the same: to better support the SEEs and thus enable the structuring development of the SE sector in Laval. The SEP aims to foster an economy based on collective action, democratic participation, and responsiveness to the needs of the territory. In the long term, it aims to promote the development of the SE in Laval by focusing on three main areas: 1) promoting and raising awareness of the SE model by highlighting its contribution to sustainable development and the economic, social, cultural

³² Social economy policy of the City of Laval.

and environmental vitality of the territory; 2) encouraging the creation and growth of SEEs in Laval, as well as the emergence of structuring projects; and 3) identifying financial levers and strategic partnerships to support the implementation of innovative and structuring projects in the SE sector.

2. Social economy policy development process

As highlighted by some interviewees, this is the first time a City of Laval policy has been developed entirely by external actors, albeit with the collaboration of city officials and elected representatives. The development process for this SEP was democratic and participatory, as several actors with diverse missions and objectives participated in the various committees and workshops organized to prepare its content. The points below describe this process and illustrate its different stages. However, it is important to begin by introducing the actors who collaborated on the SEP.

2.1. Participating actors

Many representatives and organizations' representatives within the Laval SE ecosystem participated in the various stages of developing the SEP. PRESL was mandated to develop this policy. To achieve this, it engaged the community in various ways (interviews, focus groups, creation of independent committees, and workshops) to properly support and ensure the success of its implementation.

The mobilization tools developed by PRESL and its partners are explained in more detail in the following section concerning the governance of the SEP process. In total, more than 90 people contributed to the development of this policy and its action plan by participating in one or more meetings and workshops organized by PRESL. The Laval actors involved in the various stages of developing the SEP include: the Social Economy Enterprise Directorate at Laval Économique; elected officials from Laval, particularly the elected official dedicated to the SE; Laval municipal employees; certain targeted SSEs; and citizens or representatives of civil society (community groups).

Other people outside this ecosystem have also contributed, for example: researchers from the Centre d'étude en responsabilité sociale et écocitoyenneté (CÉRSÉ) and Saint Paul University; SE councilors from other cities, including Montreal and Gatineau; SE experts such as Le Chantier de l'économie sociale and Territoires innovants en économie sociale et solidaire (TIESS); and officials from other levels of government.

In summary, this diversity of actors shows us that the process of developing the SEP is open, inclusive and participatory.

2.2. Policy development stages

The policy was developed rapidly, in a record time of approximately one year. Based on our field observations and the documents analyzed, we identified four main stages in the SEP. Here is a summary of these stages:

Stage 1 – Diagnostics, research and planning

To develop a SEP that meets the needs and realities of the Laval territory, it was important to plan the development approach, understand the territory's context, and assess its existing strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. This stage is dedicated to achieving these two important objectives: planning the approach and setting up governance structures for the process; and conducting the strategic diagnostics.

a) Planning the approach and setting up governance structures for the SEP co-construction process

It should be noted that the governance structures described below were developed by PRESL in consultation with Laval Économique. These structures are:

Steering Committee – The members of this strategic and decision-making body are: the Director of PRESL; the city councilor responsible for and representing the project for the city; the Director of Laval Économique; the Head of the Planning and Business Intelligence Division at Laval Économique; and the PRESL employees in charge of the SEP project. The Head of the Business Services Division at Laval Économique joined the committee during the process. This pivotal committee worked on developing the agreement between Laval Économique and PRESL, and validating the SEP development process and the progress reports submitted by PRESL as the project progressed.

Practitioners' Committee – This committee, in which two researchers from CÉRSE participated, is composed of experienced practitioners and experts in the SE. Members include Nancy Neamtan (founder of Le Chantier de l'économie sociale), Marie Anne Perreault (researcher at Saint Paul University), and other members of SE research and advocacy organizations (Territoires innovants en économie sociale et solidaire (TIESS), Le Chantier de l'économie sociale, and the Quebec Council for Cooperation and Mutualism (CQCM, *Conseil québécois de la coopération et de la mutualité*)). Several elected officials and public servants also participated in committee meetings on an ad hoc basis.

The primary role of the Practitioners' Committee is to monitor and identify, as sources of inspiration, other SE policies (municipal or otherwise) or actions and initiatives implemented in Quebec, elsewhere in Canada, and internationally (particularly in France), and to facilitate the transfer and exchange of knowledge between different cities developing SEPs (for example, the City of Gatineau's SEP and its action plan). This committee facilitated the launch of the SEP process. It ensured the transfer of knowledge related to what was tested during and after the development of the policy within the SE community. This committee is considered

strategic because it allows for the sharing of best practices, the co-construction of a common understanding of the Laval policy development process, and the transfer of these lessons learned to other actors and territories wishing to undertake a similar approach.

Participation space – The individuals within this space were consulted during the various phases of the SEP development. These individuals participated in interviews and focus groups, particularly those during Phase 4, "Further Development of the SEP's Guidelines and Drafting". This consultation space comprises the SEEs management of Laval Économique, a confederation of organizations, citizens, elected officials and civil servants.

Working groups – At the beginning of the SEP development process, there was a desire to create thematic working groups to address issues by sector. These groups would have varied in size and composition, including, for example, management or staff from SEEs, confederations of organizations, citizens, elected officials, civil servants, and subject matter experts. However, due to a lack of time and resources, these working groups were not formed. The issues were addressed more briefly within discussion groups with targeted participants in the previously described participation space.

In conclusion, it is worth noting that developing the SEP process and setting up the committees were coordinated and facilitated by PRESL, which was responsible for selecting and mobilizing the participating actors, conducting interviews, facilitating workshops, and drafting the SEP documents submitted to the City of Laval (on June 24, 2024) for review and approval. It should also be noted that the Commissioner for the SE at Laval Économique was involved throughout the process of SEP preparation by the PRESL.

b) Diagnostics, research and inspiration

The goal of this research and diagnostics stage was to produce a baseline assessment (profile) that informed the design of the SEP and its accompanying action plan. The methods used for the diagnostics and data collection are numerous, including: 1) many interviews conducted with elected officials and municipal employees in Laval (employees from various departments, particularly economic development); managers of SSEs (at different stages of development); citizens leading projects and individuals committed to the SE and economic development through SE projects; actors who have already developed SE policies, action plans, and social innovation labs in Quebec, Canada, and elsewhere in the world; and academics and SE experts; 2) a literature review of research works already carried out by the regional SE hubs, Le Chantier de l'économie sociale, and research centers (TIESS, CÉRSÉ, RTES).

The results of this knowledge were submitted to the partners listed above for refinement, and then to Laval Économique for validation, through the Steering Committee.

Stage 2 – Development of the main guidelines of the SEP

During this stage, the various participants worked to define the foundations of the SEP and the main themes (areas) addressed within it, for which actions were proposed to ensure their implementation. The main tasks carried out during this stage were: a) the co-creation and refinement of the SEP content during meetings with the expanded Practitioners' Committee (elected officials and civil servants); and the validation by the Practitioners' Committee and the Steering Committee. At this stage, the director of the Business Services Division of Laval Économique joined the Steering Committee (see the composition described previously); and b) the drafting of the SEP's main guidelines.

Stage 3 – Development and refinement of the SEP and the action plan

This stage was dedicated to reviewing the key guidelines of the SEP and developing an action plan based on the themes identified within these guidelines. It should be noted that the titles of the guidelines were subject to revision and disagreement until the final version was submitted by PRESL to the City of Laval.

Five workshops were organized to draft the action plan accompanying the SEP. The purpose of this process was to mobilize participants (civil servants, elected officials, enterprises, researchers, etc.) to revitalize the SE sector in Laval and to identify, during these discussion workshops, actions to be implemented to develop this sector in Laval. These workshops were thematic and organized by invitation only.

The actions undertaken during this stage were: a) organizing and preparing working meetings to refine the SEP guidelines (one meeting per guideline); b) holding five working meetings in the form of discussion groups (the first workshop focused on the cross-cutting nature of the SE; the second on the emergence of SSEs; the third on the levers for strengthening the SE; the fourth on the support and financing of SSEs; and the fifth on the vision of the Laval SE); c) drafting the final documents (of the SEP and the accompanying action plan); d) the submission of the documents to the various governance committees as well as to the members of the Steering Committee for suggestions for refinement.

Stage 4 – Planning and implementation of the SEP

Laval's SEP, co-constructed with the participation of several stakeholders, was finalized and submitted by PRESL in June 2024. It was then revised and rewritten by Laval Économique before being submitted to the City of Laval's Executive Committee, which adopted it on November 5, 2024. The accompanying action plan, which the city planned to revise and submit in the first quarter of 2025, has not yet been finalized. Therefore, at the time of writing this article, the implementation of the SEP has not yet begun, as its action plan has not yet been adopted by the city.

It should be noted, however, that PRESL proposed a strategy for implementing the SEP to increase the chances of its successful implementation. Indeed, a document outlining tools and

actions to ensure the effectiveness of the action plan was also drafted and submitted by PRESL. Among the proposed tools and actions are the following:

- a) Take on a resource from the City's general management or Laval Économique to coordinate and monitor the implementation of the SEP and the identified targets, and to act as a key contact person;
- b) Establish a SEP monitoring committee composed of representatives from Laval Économique, elected officials responsible for the SE, the Office of Social Innovation and Ecological Transition, and a representative from PRESL;
- c) Conduct regular evaluations of the implementation of the SEP to adjust as needed;
- d) Engage the various levels of government to contribute financially to the implementation of Laval's SEP;
- e) Ensure the alignment of the SEP action plan with other policies and action plans developed by the City of Laval;
- f) Develop a funding plan to support the implementation of this policy and its action plan.

The actions presented clearly emerged during the workshops and are included in the action plan submitted by PRESL with the SEP. However, it is impossible to know if all these actions will be included in the final action plan to be drafted by the City of Laval. Nevertheless, certain conditions favorable to the implementation of the SEP were identified during its development, which could facilitate its success. Indeed, several indicators suggest that the implementation of the SEP could be successful, for example: a) elected officials, civil servants and SSEs actively participated in the development of the SEP tools and guidelines, which will facilitate their understanding and integration into their respective roles; b) the development of these tools is being led locally by and for Laval organizations and citizens; c) the action plan submitted by PRESL proposes concrete actions to be implemented in the short, medium and long term.

2.3. Dynamics of the SEP development process

The key element in the development of the SEP lies in the active participation of all stakeholders involved in its implementation. This process is based on a shared commitment to collaboration among all actors involved, such as PRESL, elected officials, Laval Économique, the management of enterprises, SE experts, and Laval partners. This has enabled the creation of complex dynamics to ensure the cross-cutting nature of this policy.

To foster a climate of trust and bring the SEP closer to the actors directly involved, a consultation process was implemented to engage and listen to them. Several governance bodies were also created (as mentioned previously). However, the process is complex, as it required coordinating consultation and mobilization activities to ensure that the selected actions resulted from collaborative work that considered the objectives and issues identified and prioritized by the various partners. This process also aimed to guarantee the implementation of the action plan, while respecting the vision, guidelines, objectives, values and principles of the City of Laval's social and economic development plan.

Furthermore, despite this complexity, it is important to highlight the collaborative effort undertaken under the leadership of PRESL and Laval Économique. This initiative stems from the shared desire of the City of Laval and SE actors to define, "together", innovative and structuring SE projects that address the collective needs for sustainable development in the territory. It is also essential to note that this policy was developed in close collaboration with all stakeholders (both internal and external) of the City of Laval.

3. Content of Laval's social economy policy

Before presenting the main points outlined in the final SEP document published by the City of Laval, it is essential to explain its foundations. These are based on the results of the strategic diagnostics carried out by the group of actors involved in its development.

3.1. SEP foundations

The results of the strategic diagnostics carried out by the actors responsible for the SEP highlight the following challenges:

- a) A lack of understanding of the SE among civil servants, economic actors, and SE actors themselves, who struggle to grasp it for the following reasons: differing perspectives, conflation with community action, lack of outlook, and multiple definitions.
- b) A lack of partnership and coordination among the various actors responsible for developing SE projects. This lack of connection between municipal departments, civil servants, elected officials and actors in the SE ecosystem hinders the development of SE projects.
- c) Challenges related to the emergence and support of SE projects.
- d) Legal and regulatory obstacles (for example, Laval's law on contract management limits partnership opportunities with SSEs).
- e) Human resource challenges faced by SSEs: recruitment, retention and validation.
- f) The challenges of financing the SSEs operating in the territory of the City of Laval; plus, the challenge of size and number of SSEs in Laval (few large enterprises and fewer small ones compared to other regions of the same size).

Based on the diagnostics, the various partners responsible for developing the SEP proposed the following guidelines.

3.2 Main guidelines of the SEP

To address the challenges listed above, the partners responsible for the SEP have co-developed these guidelines:

Guideline 1 – *Optimize the contribution of the SE to Laval's socio-economic, environmental and cultural development.* This guideline has two complementary components:

The first component aims to raise awareness of the importance of the SE and its role in developing sustainable solutions to the territory's challenges. The proposed actions to implement this guideline are a) to highlight and showcase existing flagship projects and effectively addressing the territory's development challenges; b) to promote and raise the profile of the SE; c) to conduct studies to gain a better understanding of it; and d) to train municipal staff in the SE.

The second component of this guideline aims to facilitate the cross-cutting deployment of the SE across Laval's territory by identifying the activity sectors and opportunities where it would be beneficial to further deploy and leverage the SE, and to break down silos within the SE by enabling a multi-sector and multi-department approach at the city level.

Guideline 2 – *Support and encourage citizen engagement in the development of collective responses to territorial challenges.* The actions proposed for this guideline are a) to recognize the importance of citizen participation in the development of the City of Laval and the success of its socio-ecological transition plan; b) to support collaborative efforts aimed at developing collective responses to territorial challenges; c) to establish ideal conditions to foster and accelerate the emergence of SSEs initiatives; and d) to create collective living environments open to democratic participation.

Guideline 3 – *Support and assists the SSEs in all phases of their development and management challenges.* The actions proposed for this guideline are: a) to develop tools promoting the development of the SE (for example, developing a responsible procurement policy favoring SSEs); b) to review and strengthen the support and financing for SSEs with the collaboration of all actors in the ecosystem; c) to promote and enhance tools fostering a new financial culture, and raising public awareness of solidarity and ethical finance; and d) to encourage the pooling of resources (equipment, human, technological, etc.).

Guideline 4 – *Activate government tools to strengthen the SE.* The actions proposed for guideline are a) to support the development of partnership relations between the City of Laval, public institutions and local SE actors; and b) to contribute to the efforts and growth of the SE movement in Quebec, Canada and internationally.

As mentioned above, the SEP document submitted by PRESL in June 2024 has been revised to adapt it to the needs and internal terminology of the various departments of the City of Laval. The strategic guidelines of the SEP have therefore been slightly modified. We summarize them in the table below:

Table 1 – Summary table of the guidelines and objectives of the SEP

Guidelines	Objectives
1. Optimize the contribution of the SE to Laval's	- Encourage the SSE business model through municipal policies and with the ecosystem partners;

responsible and sustainable socio-economic, environmental and cultural development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identify and support innovative, collective projects that address local needs; - Promote the SE and foster collective entrepreneurship.
2. Promote and support citizen engagement in the development of the SSEs that address the collective challenges of Laval's territory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identify best practices in citizen engagement and develop a model adapted to Laval to address territorial challenges; - Propose innovative collective management solutions to facilitate SE projects; - Raise awareness among citizens, including those from immigrant backgrounds, about collective entrepreneurship.
3. Support and assist the SSEs in all phases of their development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Maintain individual and collective support with interdepartmental coordination; - Identify prototyping or experimentation opportunities for emerging SSEs or existing projects; - Assist private companies interested in collective takeover or pooling of resources.
4. Activate the various financial and strategic tools aimed at optimizing the development of structuring SE projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identify investments for collective projects that create human-scale neighborhoods; - Facilitate innovative approaches in urban planning and taxation to support the SE; - Act as a mobilizing leader within the SE ecosystem at various levels.
5. To ensure cross-cutting and evolving coordination of the SEP to increase the impact of the SE on the territory and achieve greater efficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Create an interdepartmental committee to define the action plan and monitor progress; - Identify the principles of governance and collaboration with the ecosystem; - Monitor best practices and innovative initiatives.

Source: Social economy policy of Laval, 2024.

By comparing the initial strategic guidelines of the SEP, developed during its co-construction process, with those appearing in the final document made public, it appears that the City of Laval took into account the proposals of all actors involved in the policy. It evaluated these proposals considering existing policies, retaining some, modifying others, and eliminating some.

3.4. Challenges of implementing the policy

This section addresses the challenges and perspectives related to the implementation of the co-constructed SEP, including its sustainability and the monitoring of its application.

The challenge of ensuring the sustainability of the SEP – The monitoring and implementation phase is essential, not only to ensure the completion of planned actions and make any necessary adjustments, but also to establish an "ecosystem of actors and networks" capable of sustainably supporting the co-constructed policy. This monitoring allows for the renewal of themes and the involvement of new actors, while seizing opportunities created by the evolving context. Furthermore, the co-construction dynamic could facilitate the implementation of the policy and strengthen cooperation among actors within the Laval SE ecosystem. This "social capital" could be crucial in the face of unforeseen changes in the

political and institutional environment (e.g., departures of elected officials, political shifts, local government reforms, or reallocation of funding).

Monitoring challenge – Monitoring is fundamental to ensuring the success of the actions of the SEP, adjusting strategies and creating a true "ecosystem of actors". The challenge or question lies in the composition of monitoring bodies: should they be composed solely of representatives of leaders of networks and professional structures (support/funding) or should they also include field actors and citizens?

It is also crucial to specify in the action plan the methods for monitoring the implementation of the SEP. Some proposals have already been mentioned, such as the organization of an annual meeting for an exchange of local experiences, with collective reflections combining the points of view of researchers and experts, as well as presentations of local experiments and workshops.

Conclusion

The desire to develop a Social Economy Policy (SEP) in Laval emerged in 2021 and materialized with the arrival of its new mayor in 2023. The objective is to broaden the network of entrepreneurs and projects to address the territory's environmental and social challenges. This initiative is part of a collective movement to support the emergence and growth of enterprises in the SE sector, while affirming Laval's commitment to being a leading city in this area.

The implementation of the SEP is a key step in leveraging the contributions of SSEs to socio-economic development, job creation, meeting social and environmental needs, and promoting collaboration and social innovation. By supporting this dynamic ecosystem, the City of Laval is committed to a more inclusive, sustainable and socially responsible economy. The success of this initiative depends on the involvement of all stakeholders.

The process of creation of Laval's SEP reflects a collaborative approach, characterized by the active participation of numerous local and external actors. Through a structured process involving committees, workshops and in-depth data analysis, the SEP was developed to address the specific challenges of the Laval territory. This participatory approach enabled the development of strategic guidelines tailored to local realities and ensured the buy-in of elected officials, civil servants, SSEs and citizens.

Although the action plan accompanying the SEP is still under review, the solid foundations and concrete actions proposed demonstrate its potential for successful implementation. By combining a sustainable vision, collaborative resource management, and increased citizen engagement, this policy could mark a turning point in the development of the SE in Laval, contributing to more inclusive and resilient territorial development.

Ultimately, this SEP will facilitate the launch of collective projects by citizens and SSEs, contribute to urban revitalization, and foster the creation of commons and spaces where the

SE predominates. More generally, it aims to give this sector a more prominent place in the development of Laval's territory. The implementation of this policy is also integrated into the municipal planning for 2024, ensuring that the mechanisms necessary for its success will be in place.

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ABOUT THE PUBLICATION

Founded in 2013 in Seoul, the GSEF – Global Forum for Social and Solidarity Economy – is a global organization of local governments and civil society actors committed to promoting and developing the social and solidarity economy. Its 90 members, present in 35 countries, represent the diversity of SSE stakeholders: local governments, networks of actors, associations, cooperatives, mutual societies, foundations, social enterprises, universities, etc. The GSEF supports the development of the SSE around the world by promoting dialogue between public authorities and SSE actors in order to jointly develop local public policies that contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the emergence of ecosystems conducive to the SSE.

The GSEF thematic working groups (WGs) were voted on at the General Assembly on May 5, 2023. The WG on “The Impact of SSE Public Policies on the Achievement of the SDGs” brings together some fifteen researchers from all continents. It is led by Marguerite Mendell (Karl Polanyi Institute) and Timothée Duverger (Chair Terr’ESS, Sciences Po Bordeaux) and supported by the GSEF General Secretariat employee working on his CIFRE thesis.

Following on from research already conducted by the GSEF in partnership with UNRISD, which led to the production of guidelines for local SSE policies, in January 2024 the Research WG launched a call for contributions to gather proposals for working papers focusing on three recurring processes in public action: development, implementation, and evaluation. Through the analysis of these processes of SSE public policy development, the authors of the papers (both researchers and SSE actors) were asked to examine two fundamental dimensions: the contribution of these local policies to the achievement of sustainable development goals, and the paradoxes associated with the institutionalization of the SSE.

A reading committee composed of GT members evaluated more than forty proposals, including the seventeen working papers now published under the title *Local SSE Policies enabling the Socio-Ecological Transition*. Each paper is available on the GSEF website, free of charge, in its original language (English, French, or Spanish) and in English. This publication and the English translations were made possible thanks to financial support from Caisse des Dépôts.

The concrete examples provided by these working papers will feed into programs to strengthen the capacities of local authorities and support the development of public policies favorable to the SSE.

