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Using PLS-SEM to Measure the Mediating Effect of Territory in the Relationship Between Social Innovation and Territorial Development

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Abstract

This study aims to measure the mediating effect of territory in the relationship between social innovation and territorial development. To achieve this objective, we analyzed a sample of 126 social innovation initiatives distributed across the Rabat-Salé-Kénitra region in Morocco, utilizing the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) methodology. Our research provides valuable insights into how territory plays a mediating role in facilitating the impact of social innovation initiatives on territorial development. Our analysis reveals that territory acts as a significant mediating factor between social innovation initiatives and territorial development. The results demonstrate that the effectiveness of social innovation initiatives in achieving territorial development is augmented when territorial efforts are prioritized and strategically implemented. This finding underscores the importance of considering territory as an integral component of social innovation initiatives for achieving impactful territorial development. Moreover, the research yields practical implications for policymakers, practitioners, and stakeholders involved in social innovation initiatives. Policymakers should recognize the pivotal role of territory as a mediator and support the integration of territorial considerations in social innovation programs to enhance their effectiveness. For practitioners, our findings highlight the significance of incorporating the dimension of 'territory' when designing and implementing social innovation initiatives. By acknowledging the mediating effect of territory, practitioners can enhance the sustainability and long-term impact of their initiatives. This study contributes to the existing literature by providing robust empirical evidence of the mediating effect of territory in the relationship between social innovation and territorial development. These novel insights advance our understanding of the interplay between social innovation initiatives and territorial outcomes, offering context-specific knowledge with broader implications for social innovation initiatives worldwide.

Keywords: social innovation; territory; territorial development; PLS-SEM.
JEL Classification: O15, O17, O31, Q01
Paper type: Empirical research

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IJAFAME
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1. Introduction

Territorial analysis has long integrated the importance of innovation within the dynamics of territories (Hillier et al., 2004). Territorial innovation models (e.g., innovative milieux, industrial districts, local production systems, new industrial spaces, clusters of innovation, regional innovation systems, and learning regions), as scrutinized by Moulaert and Sekia (2003), have aimed to comprehend this significance. However, this body of literature exhibits certain shortcomings primarily associated with two key aspects (MacCallum et al., 2013; Moulaert and Nussbaumer, 2014). To begin with, an excessively technology-centric approach to development, which, while gradually being revised, falls short of encompassing the diverse dimensions of innovation. Secondly, there is an overemphasis on market-driven and competitive behaviours and mechanisms, as well as a focus on competitiveness, leading to the disregard of other vital social processes that facilitate development and encompass various forms of innovation. In essence, the objective is to illustrate that by embracing the concept of social innovation, territorial analysis can significantly enhance its scope by incorporating social, environmental, cultural, and institutional aspects (Pol and Ville, 2009).

Viewed through the lens of territorial development, social innovation assumes a dual significance (Ravazzoli and Valero, 2020). Firstly, it relates to fulfilling fundamental human necessities. This interpretation finds resonance within the framework of the social economy and is also present in literature exploring alternative pathways to development (Laville, 2016). These fundamental needs go beyond mere employment and income requisites for the majority of a territory's residents, yet they often remain inadequately acknowledged within development strategies fueled by competitive motives (Moulaert and Nussbaumer, 2014). Moreover, social innovation encompasses novel approaches to social interactions, specifically the synchronization of engagements among local stakeholders committed to resolving socio-economic challenges. This coordination aims to augment the performance and well-being of territorial communities (Harrisson, 2012).

In Morocco, commitments have multiplied in favour of sustainable territorial development, and local stakeholders are called upon to implement them. For several years, they have done so in diverse and exploratory ways, revealing the complexity of operationalizing these principles due to the presence of tensions and opportunities (MacCallum et al., 2013). This requires laborious, intricate, and demanding work involving the socialization and politicization of the new practice proposed by the innovator or innovative group (Fontan, 2011; Klein and Laville, 2014).

In this perspective, understanding social innovation and its effects on territorial development becomes a major challenge: understanding them, anticipating them, and potentially influencing them through reasoned territorial policies. However, few theoretical and empirical writings delve into the mechanisms through which these effects are exerted. The very idea of conceptualizing territory as a mediating process in this relationship is scarcely present in the literature on social innovation. Nevertheless, a better understanding of the nature of this mediation is crucial for addressing the significant challenges that territories face (Fontan, 2011).

Our theoretical approach implies that the process of social innovation has an impact on the definition or redefinition of territory. Here, territory is understood as a construct of actors (Gumuchian and Pecqueur, 2007). Furthermore, we acknowledge that the processes of diffusing social innovations appear fragmented and staggered in both time and space (Fontan, 2011; Richez-Battesti, 2015). Thus, there is no automaticity in the process of spreading a social innovation that would enable linear and widespread diffusion. We view this non-linearity of diffusion as a concrete manifestation of the territorial effect (El Ghoufi, 2023). It is this pathway that we will explore in

this study. Specifically, the study aims to evaluate the mediating effect of territory in the relationship between social innovation and territorial development.

To achieve this objective, we employ structural equation modeling (SEM) through the application of the partial least squares (PLS) technique. This facilitates the examination of data collected from 126 social innovation projects dispersed across the Rabat-Salé-Kénitra region in Morocco, enabling an assessment of the viability of the proposed research model. PLS-SEM is particularly well-suited for small sample sizes and is recognized as an appropriate technique for estimating relationships between latent constructs, especially those involving mediation. Through empirical analysis, we unveil that territory acts as a significant mediating factor between social innovation initiatives and territorial development. The results demonstrate that the effectiveness of social innovation initiatives in achieving territorial development is augmented when territorial efforts are prioritized and strategically implemented. This finding underscores the importance of considering territory as an integral component of social innovation initiatives for achieving impactful territorial development.

The structure of this paper is as follows: following this introduction, Section 2 presents a comprehensive literature review and develops hypotheses. Section 3 outlines the research methodology adopted. In Section 4, we provide and discuss the results obtained from the analysis. Finally, Section 5 summarizes the main results and presents the conclusions.

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

2.1. Defining Social Innovation

Definitions of social innovation differ widely in the literature (Richez-Battesti et al., 2012; Klein and Laville, 2014; Ayob et al., 2016; Edwards-Schachter and Wallace, 2017). This variation in definitions can be attributed to the broad nature of social innovations, which encompass diverse approaches employed by individuals to develop novel and enhanced solutions for addressing pressing contemporary challenges. These challenges may include reducing carbon emissions, promoting public health, eradicating poverty, and more. While social innovation has become increasingly influential in both scholarship and policy in recent years (MacCallum et al., 2013), there has been no sustained and systematic analysis of its theories, characteristics, and impacts (Howaldt and Schwarz, 2016). In this subsection, we will present two conceptions of social innovation.

The first approach, focused on purpose, conceptualizes social innovation as a response to social or environmental needs that public action has been unable to effectively address (Hillier et al., 2004). This response is implemented by a social entrepreneur who receives funding through conventional business activities or through private or public support for initiatives that cannot be solely sustained by their activities alone (Richez-Battesti et al., 2012). In this approach, emphasis is placed on the individual and the purpose of his actions, which involves satisfying a need or resolving a social problem, as well as considering the scope of its effects (Besançon and Guyon, 2013).

The second approach focuses more on the process of social innovation (Van Dyck et al., 2013). It aligns with the institutionalist approach developed by researchers from CRISES[1], which highlights the collective dimension of the social innovation process. Here, the notion of purpose is reinforced by the notion of process. Rather than evaluating social innovation solely based on the needs it

[1] Center for Research on Social Innovations (Centre de recherche sur les innovations sociales).

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IJAFAME
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addresses, it is characterized by how this response has been defined and constructed by all relevant actors, qualifying it as socially innovative (Dandurand, 2005; Besançon and Chochoy, 2015).
For our study, we adopt a definition that integrates these different perspectives. We define social innovation as a process that gives rise to a new approach, practice, intervention, or even a new product developed to improve a situation or solve a social or environmental problem (purpose). This process is conditioned by democratic, inclusive, and environmentally respectful functioning, which deviates from the usual practices in a given context. The diffusion of these practices could bring about changes in terms of territorial development.

2.2. Social Innovation, Territory and Territorial Development

Several theoretical works have examined the link between social innovations and territorial development (MacCallum et al., 2009; Fontan, 2011; Bellemare and Klein, 2011; Moulaert and Nussbaumer, 2014; Tricarico et al., 2020; Mayer et al., 2021). Innovative initiatives driven by local actors can take various forms. Many attempts at typology have been proposed concerning innovative initiatives in the field of local development (Moulaert and Sekia, 2003; Klein, 2014). In this regard, Klein (2014) distinguishes four approaches: productive, technological, political, and solidarity-based.

- The productive approach emphasizes the need to geographically cluster various types of businesses and actors from the same sector to create a dynamic of local development (e.g., Local Productive System - LPS). The starting point of these studies is that spatial proximity leads socio-economic actors to value territorial identity and, consequently, adopt local forms of governance to organize the convergence of actors involved in the production.
- The technological approach focuses on the social configurations that can promote technological innovation within local enterprises. Two branches can be distinguished in this sense: regional innovation systems and innovative environments.
- The third approach, political, essentially raises the issue of power, particularly local power, at the centre of the analysis of the capacity of local actors to innovate. The central concept of this approach is that of a "coalition," defined as the set of formal and informal networks structured between public and private actors within a territorial entity (Stone, 1989). According to this approach, the coalition is a specific configuration of actors capable of mobilizing internal and external resources. Thus, the directions and effectiveness of the restructuring implemented in local societies depend on the type and duration of the coalition among the socio-economic actors who carry it out.
- As for the solidarity-based approach, it is based on studies that posit that the local territory is a generator of social ties and collective actions (Denieuil, 1997). According to this perspective, the sense of territorial belonging leads actors to undertake collective actions with economic objectives aimed at reconciling the economy and society (Lévesque, 2008).

From the perspective of social innovation, these sectoral approaches are insufficient. They must be combined. This is conveyed by the "integrated territorial development" approach (Hillier et al., 2004). The highlighting of the territory as a privileged scene of development is part of a global change, a paradigm shift (Pecqueur, 2006; Klein, 2014). Accordingly, our theoretical approach suggests that the process of social innovation has a strong impact on the formation of territories (Fontan, 2011; Van Dyck et al., 2013; Besançon and Chochoy, 2015). In this regard, the territory is seen as the result of construction by local actors, at different spatial scales and through various modalities, to act collectively and address collective problems (Pecqueur, 2010; Moyart, 2020).

Since it is an organization, the territory is necessarily linked to the question of governance (Leloup et al., 2005), and due to its purpose of conceiving and implementing projects, it embodies an even greater need for governance (Rochman, 2008). As the territory is constructed by various actors, it relies on a minimum level of convergence among divergent interests, and governance is precisely established based on compromises between these divergent interests (Novy et al., 2009). Furthermore, as highlighted by Cunha (1998), territorial public policies cannot be formulated and implemented without the participation of both public and private actors. This participation should encompass as many segments as possible (economic, social, political, and cultural), which are constitutive elements of territorial configurations.

More importantly, we are aware that the processes of diffusion of social innovations appear fragmented and delayed in time and space (Fontan, 2011; Richez-Battesti, 2015). There is no automaticity in the process of spreading a social innovation that would allow for a linear and widespread diffusion of its use. This situation of perfect diffusion rarely occurs. We see in this non-linearity of diffusion a concrete manifestation of the 'territory effect' (Trent et al., 2009; Fontan, 2011; Vasconcellos Oliveira, 2021).

Based on the considerations presented above, the following hypotheses were formulated:

Hypothesis 1 (H1). *Social innovations (SIs) directly affect territorial development (TD)*.

Hypothesis 2 (H2). *The effect of SIs on TD is mediated by territory*.

Hypothesis 2 (H2) is subdivided into the following three :

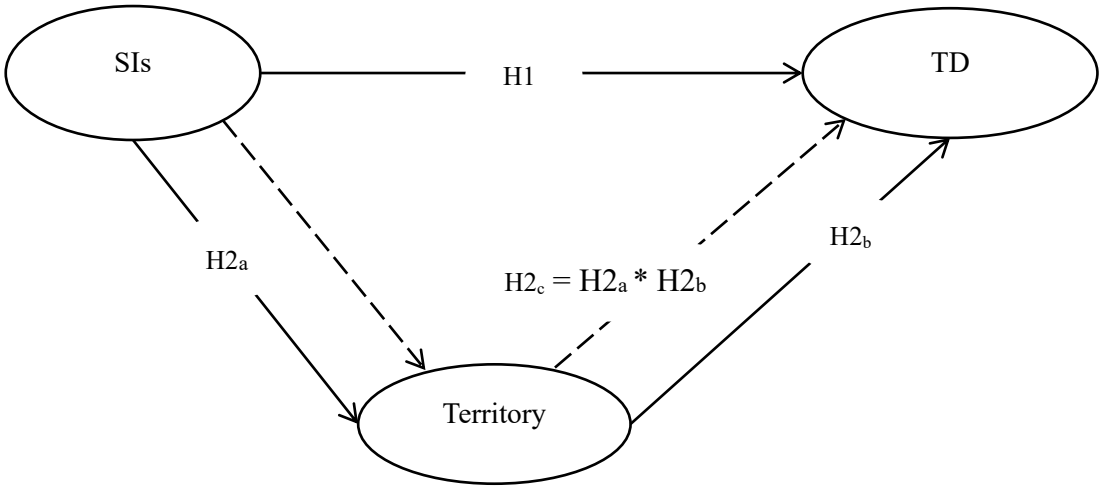
Hypothesis 2_a ($H2_a$). *SIs have a positive effect on territory*.

Hypothesis 2_b ($H2_b$). The *territory has a positive effect on TD*.

Hypothesis 2_c ($H2_c$). *SIs indirectly affect TD through the territory*.

The research model based on the hypotheses formulated in this section is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Research Model. Note: The path line H2c represents the mediation relationship.



Source: The author.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Data Collection and Analysis Method

The data were collected from a sample of 126 social innovation projects distributed across the Rabat-Salé-Kénitra region. The two figures below show the distribution of survey sites and the distribution of projects by purpose.

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Figure 2. Distribution of survey sites

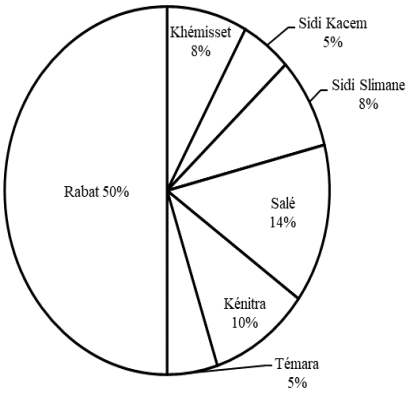
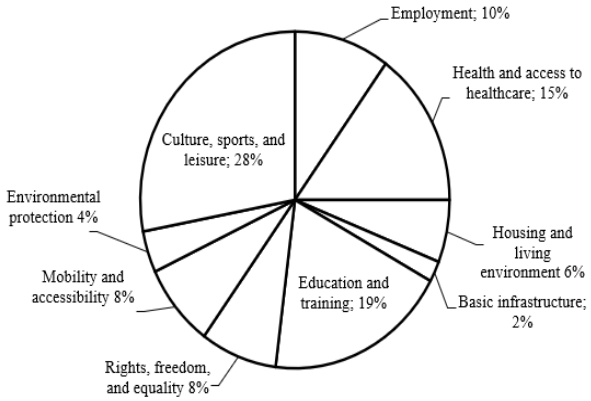


Figure 3. Distribution of projects by purpose



Source: The author.

Two types of data were used for this study: primary data and secondary data. The primary data were obtained through a survey conducted with the selected sample of projects. These data were collected from July to September 2022 and covered a period of three years (May 2019 to April 2022). The secondary data were collected from three public organizations[2] (MSISF, ADS, ODCO).

Table 1. Fieldwork Data Sheet

Sample seize	**126**
Scope of application	Rabat-Salé-Kénitra Region
Answers obtained	92
Response rate	73 %
Fieldwork	From July to September 2022

Source: The author.

To analyze our data, we chose to use Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with the Partial Least Squares (PLS) method. Firstly, the conceptual model adopted in this study is well-suited for the PLS method as it involves multiple latent variables interconnected in examining the relationship between social innovation and territorial development. Secondly, this relationship has been empirically underexplored. Finally, we have a small sample size that does not allow for the use of covariance-based structural equation modeling.

3.2. Operationalization of Variables

The three constructs have been measured with a Likert-type scale with five levels of answers, from 1 = "Strongly disagree" to 5 = "strongly agree" for social innovation, territory and territorial development.

[2] *MSISF = Ministre de la Solidarité, de l'Insertion sociale et de la Famille ; ADS = Agence de Développement Social ; ODCO = Office du Développement de Coopération.*

Table 2. Definition of Measurement Items

Construct	Code	Item	Adapted from
Social Innovation	SI1	1. Our projects help meet needs that are not satisfied by the state or the market.	Besançon (2013); Unceta et al. (2016); El Ghoufi (2023).
	SI2	2. Through our projects, we improve access to resources for the most vulnerable and promote solidarity and cohesion within the territory.	
	SI3	3. Through our projects, we contribute to addressing issues of precarity within the territory.	
	SI4	4. Through our offerings, we respond to the challenges of sustainable development.	
	SI5	5. Staff training.	
	SI6	6. Analysis of the social needs of the population within their territory.	
	SI7	7. Search for innovative solutions to identified needs.	
	SI8	8. Creation of a space for exchanging ideas or collectively developing solutions.	
Territory	TER1	1. The target population was only informed about the project.	Rochman (2008); Pecqueur (2010); Fontan (2011); Besançon (2013) ; El Ghoufi (2023).
	TER2	2. The target population was involved in the decision-making process and actively participated in the design, implementation, and evaluation of the project.	
	TER3	3. The target population created new structures through the project.	
	TER4	4. The project is part of a territorial project or territorial policy.	
	TER5	5. The projects are approved by a territorial governance entity.	
	TER6	6. The results obtained are evaluated by a territorial governance entity.	
Territorial Development	TD1	1. Employment.	Cunha (1988); Rochman (2008); El Ghoufi (2023).
	TD2	2. Health and access to healthcare.	
	TD3	3. Housing and living environment.	
	TD4	4. Basic infrastructure (water, electricity, and sanitation).	
	TD5	5. Education and training.	
	TD6	6. Rights, freedom, and equality.	
	TD7	7. Mobility and accessibility.	
	TD8	8. Environmental protection.	
	TD9	9. Culture, sports, and leisure.	

Source: The author.

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IJAFAME
International Journal of Accounting, Finance, Auditing, Management & Economics

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Analysis of the Measurement Model

To assess the measurement model's performance, an examination of indicators and construct reliability, convergence validity, and discriminant validity was conducted. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Outer model results for 11 indicators corresponding to three constructs.

Construct	Code	Loading	t-value	Cronbach's alpha	CR	AVE
SI	SI3	0.463	3.595 ***	-	-	-
	SI5	0.873	14.738 ***			
	SI6	0.751	7.057 ***			
	SI7	0.708	7.450 ***			
Territory	TER1	0.865	16.745 ***	0.739	0.835	0.562
	TER3	0.797	14.745 ***			
	TER5	0.650	6.844 ***			
	TER6	0.662	9.404 ***			
TD	TD1	0.710	7.784 ***	0.734	0.761	0.520
	TD2	0.600	3.802 ***			
	TD8	0.834	15.876 ***			

*Note: CR = Composite Reliability; AVE = Average Variance Extracted. ***: $p < 0.001$; SI: Formative Construct;*

Source: The author.

The assessment of construct reliability involved evaluating factor loadings, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, and the average variance extracted, as described by Henseler and Schuberth (2020). The examination of indicator reliability was based on their loadings. Most factor loadings exceeded the established threshold of 0.7 (Hair et al., 2016), with only four falling below this value. However, instead of automatically discarding items below 0.7, a careful analysis was conducted to determine whether excluding them would enhance composite reliability or average variance extracted values beyond the recommended threshold (Hair et al., 2012). Ultimately, all items were retained, demonstrating the reliability of the indicators.

The constructs' reliability was verified through Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability, with values ranging from 0.734 to 0.835, indicating strong reliability (Hair et al., 2016). As for convergent validity, the average variance extracted (AVE) was employed, and all AVE values exceeded 0.5, affirming the internal consistency of the reflective scales (Hair et al., 2020).

In the context of the PLS approach, discriminant validity refers to the degree of distinction between items belonging to one construct compared to items of other constructs within the model. This evaluation is rooted in the notion that a construct should exhibit a stronger correlation with its own indicators than with indicators of other constructs. To assess discriminant validity, we employed three tests: the Fornell-Larcker criterion (Fornell and Larcker, 1981), cross-loading analysis, and the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio.

The initial test, known as the Fornell-Larcker criterion, involves comparing the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE) with the correlations between constructs within the model. Specifically, the square root of the AVE for each construct should exceed the highest correlation between any two constructs. In practical terms, this means ensuring that the diagonal elements of the correlation matrix have greater values than the off-diagonal elements. Based on our analysis (see Table 4), the Fornell-Larcker criterion has been satisfied.

Table 4. Fornell-Larcker criterion.

Construct	**TD**	**Territory**
TD	0.721	
Territory	0.540	0.749

Source: The author.

The second criterion for assessing discriminant validity involves examining cross-loadings. As shown in Table 5, all factor loadings for the items are higher than their corresponding cross-loadings. This finding confirms the presence of discriminant validity (Henseler et al., 2015), indicating that each item is more closely associated with its designated construct than with any other construct in the model.

Table 5. Cross-loading.

	SI	**TD**	**Territory**
SI3	0.463	0.316	0.245
SI5	0.873	0.550	0.507
SI6	0.751	0.456	0.453
SI7	0.708	0.323	0.529
TD1	0.428	0.710	0.322
TD2	0.335	0.600	0.318
TD8	0.506	0.834	0.501
TER1	0.490	0.325	0.865
TER3	0.436	0.506	0.797
TER5	0.343	0.242	0.650
TER6	0.526	0.470	0.662

Source: The author.

Lastly, to further verify discriminant validity, we conducted the heterotrait-monotrait ratio of the correlations (HTMT) test. As presented in Table 6, the HTMT value is below the recommended threshold of 0.85 (Henseler et al., 2015). This result provides additional evidence that the constructs in the model are distinct from each other, supporting their discriminant validity.

Table 6. Hetrotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT).

Territory <-> TD	**0.807**
Source: The author.	

Source: The author.

Following the three tests we conducted, the discriminant validity of our model is established.

4.2. Analysis of the Structural Model

The analysis of the structural model commences with an examination of the variance inflation factor (VIF) to detect any potential multicollinearity issue. The results displayed in Table 8 indicate that the VIF values range from 1 to 1.608. Such low values suggest the absence of a multicollinearity problem in the structural model (Kock, 2015).

The coefficient of determination (R^2) was employed to assess the explanatory power of the dependent variables, and the effect size (f^2) of the standardized regression coefficients was measured following the approach by Hair et al. (2017). The outcomes are presented in Table 7 and Table 8. R^2 serves as a metric to analyze the model's predictive capacity, indicating the proportion of variance in a variable that can be explained by the predicting variables within the model. A higher R^2 value indicates a stronger predictive power of the model. In our results, the variance

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IJAFAME
International Journal of Accounting, Finance, Auditing, Management & Economics

explained for "Territory" is 37.8%, and for "Territorial Development" is 40.3%. Both of these values exceed the minimum threshold of 10% established by Falk and Miller (1992).
According to Cohen (1988), the individual contribution of each independent variable to the R^2 values of a dependent variable can be measured using the f^2 effect size. Effect sizes of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 are considered to indicate small, medium, or large effects, respectively. Additionally, Chin (2010) established a minimum threshold of 0.02 for the f^2 effect size. In our analysis, the results presented in Table 8 demonstrate that all cases exceed this minimum value, indicating that the impact of each independent variable on the R^2 values of the dependent variables is significant and surpasses the minimum effect size threshold.
The Q^2 value indicates the predictive relevance of the endogenous variables, and for them to be considered good, the Q^2 value must be greater than 0 (Janadari et al., 2016). As observed in Table 7, the model demonstrates predictive power for all the constructs, as their Q^2 values are above 0. Consequently, the model's predictive relevance is established, indicating that it is capable of predicting endogenous variables effectively.

Table 7. Coefficient of determination, predictive relevance and GoF.

	R^2	Q^2	AVE	GoF
Territory	0.378	0.337	0.562	
TD	0.403	0.296	0.520	
				0.459

Source: The author.

To evaluate the overall fit of the model, we utilized the Goodness of Fit (GoF) criterion. Tenenhaus et al. (2005) defined the GoF as a measure of the overall fit, considering both the measurement model and the structural model, with an emphasis on overall performance (Henseler et al., 2013). In Table 7, the calculated GoF value is 0.459, which surpasses the cut-off value of 0.36 proposed by Wetzels et al. (2009). This result allows us to conclude that our model demonstrates a good fit to the data, indicating that the model's overall performance in terms of fit is satisfactory.

4.3. Path Coefficient and Mediating Effect

The results in Table 8 indicate a direct and positive influence of SIs on TD (β = 0.422 ***), confirming Hypothesis (H1). Additionally, the analysis confirms Hypothesis 2_a ($H2_a$), indicating that SIs have a significant and positive direct effect on territory (β = 0.615 ***). Furthermore, the findings support Hypothesis 2_b ($H2_b$) by revealing a positive and significant direct influence of territory on TD (β = 0.281 ***).

Table 8. Structural model and hypotheses testing.

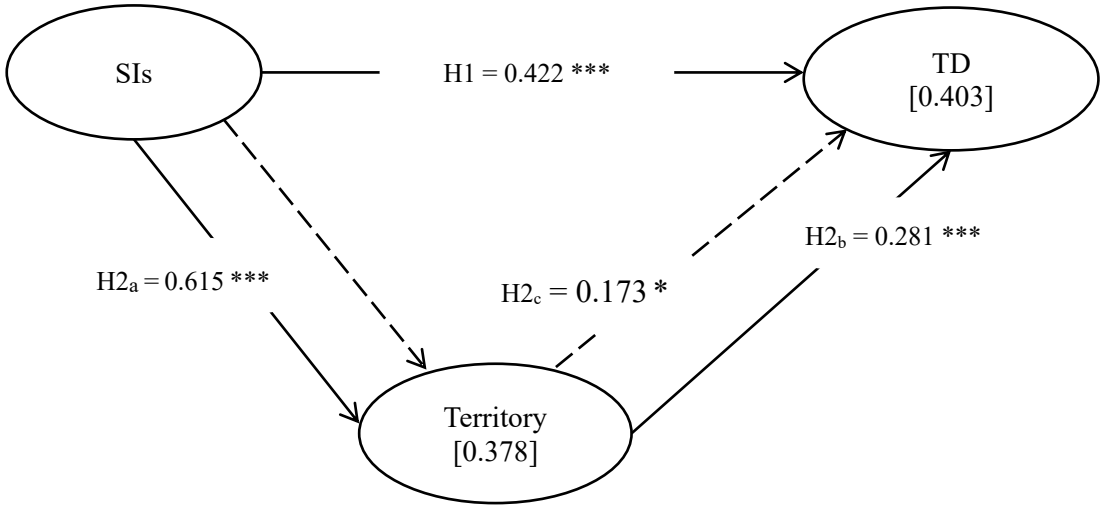
	Path	SD	t-value	f^2		H	Supported
Direct effects					VIF		
SIs → TD	0.422	0.119	3.539 ***	0.185	1.608	H1	Yes
SIs → Territory	0.615	0.074	8.316 ***	0.608	1.000	$H2_a$	Yes
Territory → TD	0.281	0.126	2.221 ***	0.082	1.608	$H2_b$	Yes
Indirect effect					VAF		
SIs → Territory → TD	0.173	0.079	2.195 *		29.07%	$H2_c$	Yes
Total effect							
SIs → TD	0.595	0.083	7.153 ***				

*VIF: Variance Inflation Factors; VAF: Variance Accounted Formula × 100 represents the proportion mediated. *: $p < 0.05$; ***: $p < 0.001$.*

Source: The author.

Moreover, the results in Table 8 provide insights into the mediating effect of territory in the relationship between SIs and TD, as well as the variance accounted for (VAF). The findings reveal a positive and significant indirect effect of SIs on TD through territory (β = 0.173 *). The VAF indicates that the indirect effect accounts for approximately 29.07% of the total effect. These results support hypothesis $H2_c$ and suggest the presence of partial mediation.
The figure below shows the verified hypothetical relationships.

Figure 4. Results of PLS analysis



*. *: p < 0.05; ***: p < 0.001.*

Source: The author.

4.4. Discussion

The current research has affirmed the role of territory as a mediator in the causal relationship between social innovations and territorial development. In other words, the results indicate that the effectiveness of social innovation initiatives in achieving territorial development is enhanced when territorial efforts are prioritized and strategically implemented (the VAF indicates that the indirect effect accounts for approximately 29.07% of the total effect, as shown in Table 8). This finding underscores the significance of considering territory as an integral component of social innovation initiatives for achieving impactful territorial development. These findings are consistent with those reported by Fontan (2011), who identified a positive relationship between social innovation and territorial development through the lens of territory.
However, it is challenging to regard the social innovation projects conducted in our study region as truly cross-cutting. We have indeed observed that the promoters of development, particularly public authorities, play a limited role in connecting the various initiatives they support. Funding is allocated in isolation to specific initiatives that, nevertheless, correspond to the same territorial development objective rather than a specific goal. This results in redundancies and the squandering of energy and resources, leading to certain initiatives, despite their significance in the fight against poverty, being treated unevenly or even entirely overlooked. Numerous examples in the Rabat-Salé-Kénitra region illustrate cases where the same development actions are undertaken by different actors without any consultation or coordination among the initiatives. The lack of coordination is not only evident at the territorial level but also manifests as a misalignment between local and global concerns.

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IJAFAME
International Journal of Accounting, Finance, Auditing, Management & Economics

The absence of cross-cutting approaches and the predominant sectoral nature of social innovation initiatives constitute a substantial impediment to realizing a genuine process of territorial development. We have noted confusion among local actors regarding the territorial level at which actions or initiatives are conceived and their territorial and cross-cutting nature. Mere conception at the territorial level does not necessarily imply territoriality; it may not encompass all developmental components or all constituent actors of the territory.

The lack of cross-cutting approaches is also tied to the sectoral logic of social innovation initiatives and the overly restricted composition of the coalitions themselves. Initiatives struggle to transcend the bounds of social action and remain largely situated within this context. This outcome largely stems from the orientations and expertise of the principal local actors. It is indeed unrealistic to expect an actor, especially if it is not their original vocation, to possess the capacity to conceive and execute projects encompassing all sectors of the local economy and, even more ambitiously, all segments of society. Thus, the greatest challenges and opportunities for improvement lie in embracing cross-cutting approaches.

5. Conclusions

The primary objective of this study was to measure the mediating effect of territory in the relationship between social innovation and territorial development using PLS-SEM. Valuable insights were gained into how territory plays a mediating role in facilitating the impact of social innovation initiatives on territorial development.

Territory acts as a significant mediating factor between social innovation initiatives and territorial development. The results demonstrate that the effectiveness of social innovation initiatives in achieving territorial development is augmented when territorial efforts are prioritized and strategically implemented. This finding underscores the importance of considering territory as an integral component of social innovation initiatives for achieving impactful territorial development.

Our research yields practical implications for policymakers, practitioners, and stakeholders involved in social innovation initiatives. Policymakers should recognize the pivotal role of territory as a mediator and support the integration of territorial considerations in social innovation programs to enhance their effectiveness. For practitioners, our findings highlight the significance of incorporating the dimension of 'territory' when designing and implementing social innovation initiatives. By acknowledging the mediating effect of territory, practitioners can enhance the sustainability and long-term impact of their initiatives.

This study contributes to the existing literature by providing empirical evidence of the mediating effect of territory in the relationship between social innovation and territorial development. These novel insights advance our understanding of the interplay between social innovation initiatives and territorial outcomes.

In conclusion, our study successfully measures the mediating effect of territory in the relationship between social innovation initiatives and territorial development. The results emphasize the crucial role of territory in facilitating the impact of social innovation on territorial outcomes. By incorporating territorial considerations, positive and enduring impacts on societal well-being can be fostered, contributing to sustainable territorial development.

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