

Human, Social, and Cultural Resources Mobilized by Public Action in Support of Social Innovation in Rural Tourism

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Abstract

This study examines the mobilization of human, social, and cultural resources by public action in the development of social innovation within rural tourism in the Marrakech–Safi region, drawing on the analytical framework of the theory of change. It is based on the assumption that public policies generate differentiated effects depending on their capacity to activate locally embedded intangible resources. The analysis therefore focuses on the mechanisms through which human skills, community dynamics, and cultural heritage contribute to territorial transformations. The study adopts a qualitative approach based on interviews conducted with institutional and territorial actors, complemented by lexicometric analyses including lexical distribution, correspondence factor analysis, similarity analysis, and word cloud visualization. The results highlight the strong centrality of human and social resources in the causal chains of change, notably through training, the inclusion of women and youth, cooperative structuring, and community dynamics. Public action emerges as a catalyst playing a role of support, coordination, and recognition of local actors. However, the analysis also reveals the predominance of formalized institutional frameworks and a still partial mobilization of deep cultural resources and local knowledge. The role of the university, although acknowledged, remains peripheral within territorial dynamics. Anchored in the theory of change, the study shows that the sustainability of social innovation in rural tourism depends primarily on the capacity of public action to activate human, social, and cultural resources in an inclusive and territorially embedded manner in the Marrakech–Safi region.

Keywords: social innovation; public action; rural tourism; theory of change; human resources; social capital; cultural resources; Marrakech–Safi.

JEL classification: JEL code 1; L83 ; O35 ; R11 ; Z32

Introduction

Rural tourism now occupies an increasingly important place in territorial development strategies, particularly in regions characterized by economic and social vulnerabilities but endowed with rich human and cultural resources. In the Marrakech–Safi region, public action has gradually shifted toward forms of intervention that move beyond a strictly infrastructural or promotional logic, by integrating objectives of social inclusion, the valorization of local know-how, and



territorial sustainability. In this context, social innovation emerges as a central lever for transforming rural tourism dynamics, by emphasizing community participation, cooperation among actors, and the recognition of local identities. However, although public arrangements have multiplied, understanding the mechanisms through which these policies effectively mobilize human, social, and cultural resources remains partial. Traditional approaches tend to privilege institutional instruments, without always questioning the intangible inputs that condition local appropriation and the sustainability of initiatives. Yet, in territories such as Marrakech–Safi, marked by strong social, cultural, and spatial diversity, the success of social innovation policies largely depends on their ability to activate local skills, community networks, and cultural heritage. This study therefore adopts a perspective aimed at analyzing the structuring role of these intangible resources in the processes of transformation of rural tourism.

To apprehend these dynamics, the study mobilizes the theory of change as a general analytical framework, allowing the examination of the causal chains linking public action to observed social transformations. This approach considers that the outcomes of public policies do not stem solely from the implementation of formal arrangements, but from intermediate mechanisms based on the activation of human, social, and cultural capacities. Applied to rural tourism in the Marrakech–Safi region, the theory of change provides a relevant lens for understanding how local skills, social capital, and cultural resources function as essential inputs to social change. The objective of this study is therefore to analyze, through a qualitative approach, the way in which public action mobilizes these resources to support social innovation in rural tourism. Drawing on lexicometric analyses, the study seeks to identify the mechanisms through which these resources are recognized, structured, and integrated into public arrangements. It also aims to highlight the limitations and tensions that may hinder their activation, particularly in terms of inclusivity, territorial embeddedness, and the articulation between institutional knowledge and local knowledge. In this sense, this research seeks to contribute to a better understanding of the conditions underpinning the sustainability of social innovation policies in the rural territories of Marrakech–Safi.

1. Literature Review

1.1. Theory of Change and Social Innovation

Within the theory of change, human and social resources constitute fundamental intangible inputs, without which institutional and economic arrangements cannot generate sustainable transformation. Weiss (1995) emphasizes that public policies rely on implicit assumptions regarding the capacities of individuals and groups to appropriate the actions being implemented. Applied to rural tourism, this perspective makes it possible to interpret human resources—such as local skills, community leadership, and civic engagement—as initial conditions of social change. Sen (1999) stresses the central role of human capabilities in any development process, showing that material resources have effects only insofar as they expand people’s real freedoms to act. In rural territories, often marked by structural vulnerabilities, public action oriented toward social innovation seeks precisely to activate these capabilities through training, support, and the recognition of local actors. Putnam et al. (1992) demonstrate that social capital, grounded in networks, norms of cooperation, and trust, constitutes a key lever of collective performance. From a theory of change perspective, the mobilization of these human and social resources therefore represents a decisive link in the causal chain connecting public intentions to expected outcomes. In the absence of local change agents and effective relational dynamics, social innovation in rural tourism risks remaining formal and weakly embedded in territorial practices.



The theory of change also helps explain how social resources function as intermediate mechanisms in the transformation of rural territories. Coleman (1988) defines social capital as a set of resources embedded in social relations that facilitate collective action. In rural tourism, these relations take the form of cooperatives, local associations, community networks, or territorial partnerships, often supported or structured by public action. Woolcock (2001) shows that effective development policies are those that manage to articulate local social capital with institutional interventions, avoiding both top-down logics and community isolation. From this perspective, social innovation appears as a relational process grounded in cooperation between public actors and local populations. The theory of change allows these dynamics to be identified as mediation mechanisms linking mobilized resources to produced effects. When public action supports the structuring of social networks, it enhances information flows, collective learning, and the capacity to coordinate tourism projects with social objectives. However, the theory of change also calls for an analysis of the concrete conditions under which these social resources are activated, particularly in light of existing asymmetries. In rural tourism, this implies paying particular attention to the inclusiveness of public arrangements, so that social innovation is not captured solely by actors already endowed with strong relational resources.

Cultural resources occupy a central place in the theory of change as applied to social innovation in rural tourism contexts. Throsby (2001) considers culture as a specific form of capital, carrying both symbolic and economic values, capable of generating development dynamics when it is recognized and integrated into public policies. In rural territories, these resources take the form of intangible heritage, artisanal know-how, local cultural practices, and collective memories. Public action then acts as a mechanism of recognition and mediation, by incorporating these cultural dimensions into sustainable tourism strategies. Ray (1998), through the concept of neo-endogenous development, shows that the valorization of local identities constitutes a key lever of collective mobilization and territorial structuring. Within the theory of change, these cultural resources function as symbolic catalysts of change, by strengthening the sense of belonging and the legitimacy of social innovation initiatives. MacCannell (2013), however, highlights the risks associated with the excessive commodification of local cultures in tourism dynamics. An approach grounded in the theory of change therefore leads to an examination of the conditions under which public action succeeds in supporting culture as a living and evolving resource. In rural tourism, social innovation rests precisely on this articulation between cultural valorization, social inclusion, and territorial sustainability.

The mobilization of human, social, and cultural resources produces sustainable effects only if it is embedded in processes of collective learning and gradual institutionalization. Argyris and Schön (1997) show that organizational learning is a key factor in transforming practices, as it enables actors to question their frames of action. Within the theory of change, these learning processes represent essential feedback mechanisms, linking intermediate outcomes to future policy adjustments. In rural tourism, public action can foster such learning by supporting spaces for dialogue, training, and co-construction between local actors and institutions. Wenger (1999) emphasizes that communities of practice play a decisive role in the diffusion of knowledge and the consolidation of innovations. However, Moulaert et al. (2013) caution that the institutionalization of social innovations carries a risk of normalization that may reduce their transformative potential. The theory of change makes it possible to identify this tension between stabilization and adaptability. Effective public action in rural tourism is therefore action that institutionalizes principles such as participation, cultural recognition, and inclusion, while maintaining room for experimentation. In this way, human, social, and cultural resources become not only inputs to change, but also vectors of territorial resilience capable of sustaining social innovation over the long term.



1.2. Human, Social and Cultural Resources and Rural Tourism

Sheldon, Pollock, and Daniele (2017) show that the creation of social value in tourism relies on the joint mobilization of the human, social, and cultural capital held by local communities. Social innovation cannot emerge without actors capable of activating these resources from a collective perspective, particularly when social entrepreneurs play an intermediary role between communities and institutions. This capacity for activation presupposes a favorable institutional environment, which gives public action a structuring function in the recognition and support of local initiatives. Petruzzella et al. (2017) highlight that Mediterranean rural territories draw on social cohesion, local norms, and actor networks to engage in social innovation dynamics. The valorization of biodiversity, local knowledge, and ethical codes constitutes an intangible foundation that can be mobilized by public policies, including when rural tourism serves as a vector of territorial development. This logic aligns with that of Lehtola and Stähle (2014), for whom societal innovation is situated at the interface between the state and civil society. The transformation of governance modes relies on the activation of social and cultural resources, enabling public actors to support inclusive arrangements capable of addressing collective needs in rural tourism territories.

Knickel et al. (2009) show that innovation in rural areas emerges primarily from collaborative networks based on information exchange and collective learning. The ability of local actors to interact, cooperate, and share knowledge constitutes a decisive human and social resource for supporting social innovation initiatives, particularly in rural tourism. This relational dynamic goes beyond strictly entrepreneurial logics and refers to collective processes structured by local interactions. Carra et al. (2018) extend this perspective by emphasizing that public action can foster such dynamics by mobilizing human and social resources through citizen participation and associative engagement. Local policies contribute to strengthening social capital by establishing forms of collaboration and institutional trust, conditions that are favorable to the emergence of community-based projects, including when rural tourism represents an indirect field of application. From a more sectoral perspective, Vázquez-Maguirre (2020) shows that public action explicitly mobilizes social and human resources within the framework of tourism-related social innovation. Her findings suggest that networking supported by public arrangements facilitates access to financing, stabilizes employment, and improves social protection. These mechanisms strengthen working conditions and structure social innovation trajectories grounded in territorial embeddedness and the institutional recognition of rural social enterprises.

Flora (2008) emphasizes that social capital, including political capital, constitutes a central link between individuals, organizations, and access to resources. This conception implies that public action plays a decisive role in mobilizing local resources by facilitating access to power, building durable networks, and promoting collaborative governance. In rural tourism, this articulation supports social innovation dynamics based on community resilience. Dahles et al. (2020) show that government support programs mobilize social and cultural resources by fostering horizontal collaborations among local organizations. These forms of cooperation facilitate access to public funding and enhance the inclusivity of social innovation initiatives in rural tourism. Such collective mobilization contributes to structuring community development trajectories supported by public action. Cajaiba-Santana (2014) complements this reading by emphasizing that social innovations, oriented toward social practices, depend on the social structures that frame or constrain agents' actions. This perspective implies that social and cultural capital constitutes a fundamental lever for collective action. In the context of rural tourism, public intervention can therefore strengthen communities' capacities to act by structuring frameworks conducive to cooperation, participation, and the transformation of local social practices.



Belliggiano et al. (2021) show that rural tourism can constitute a form of social innovation when cultural resources are integrated through arrangements such as ecomuseums and the valorization of bio-cultural heritage. These initiatives foster social cohesion and strengthen the sense of community belonging, while structuring collective uses of heritage. Stanciu et al. (2024) emphasize that social innovation in rural tourism relies on the mobilization of endogenous cultural and social resources. Anchoring technological and organizational innovations in local values and traditions helps avoid excessive standardization processes while reinforcing community cohesion. This articulation between modernization and cultural heritage requires public support that is attentive to territorial specificities. Gordan et al. (2023) highlight that public action also mobilizes human resources by creating entrepreneurial opportunities for youth and women in rural tourism. These policies contribute to the professionalization of human capital and to generational and gender equity, while valorizing local traditions as educational and economic resources. These dynamics reflect an integrated mobilization of human, social, and cultural resources in the service of territorial social innovation.

Dredge (2017) shows that public policies and institutional support facilitate social entrepreneurship in tourism by enabling the mobilization of community-based human, social, and cultural capital. This approach implies that public arrangements play a role of legitimation and risk reduction for social innovation initiatives, particularly in rural contexts characterized by limited resources but strong local embeddedness. Caraveli and Chardas (2013) analyze the LEADER program and highlight its role in mobilizing social and cultural resources to promote integrated territorial development. The creation of local partnerships and multi-level networks fosters social innovation by capitalizing on local know-how, cultural specificities, and cooperation between public and private actors, including in rural tourism. Neumeier (2012) complements this perspective by considering that social innovation emerges through co-evolutionary learning processes within hybrid networks of human and non-human actors. This conception implies that the mobilization of social resources and human capacities is embedded in evolving local dynamics, where public action can support the structuring of networks conducive to territorially embedded social innovation.

Arboleda et al. (2020) show that social innovation constitutes a central strategy for strengthening community-based rural tourism, drawing on the mobilization of local social and cultural resources. These resources foster sustainable development trajectories based on community participation and the valorization of territorial identities. Korsgaard et al. (2015) distinguish rural entrepreneurship from entrepreneurship in rural areas by emphasizing the entrepreneur's deep commitment to place and its resources. This distinction implies that rural entrepreneurship mobilizes human and social resources from a regional development perspective, in which natural and cultural resources are valorized beyond individual interests. Bell and Jayne (2010) show that rural creative industries, such as crafts and the arts, constitute resources capable of renewing local economic and cultural life. The balance between cultural and economic development makes it possible to build a knowledge-based economy linked to social inclusion and cultural policies. In rural tourism, this mobilization of cultural resources supports forms of social innovation articulated with territorial dynamics and public action.

Christoforou and Pisani (2015) show that social capital, understood as networks of trust and cooperation, is mobilized by LEADER projects to support social innovation in rural territories. Community participation and the emergence of new forms of governance strengthen human and social resources, while valorizing local cultural resources within integrated rural tourism. Emery and Flora (2006) demonstrate that the accumulation of different forms of capital within a community reinforces them mutually. Cultural capital, including intangible heritage, and human



capital derived from rural skills can be mobilized by public action to initiate processes of regeneration and social innovation. This transformation of capital into mobilizable resources makes it possible to structure sustainable dynamics in rural tourism. It follows that public action plays a central role in the coordinated activation of human, social, and cultural resources, by supporting governance, collective learning, and participation frameworks capable of fostering social innovation in rural tourism territories.

2. Study Objective and Population

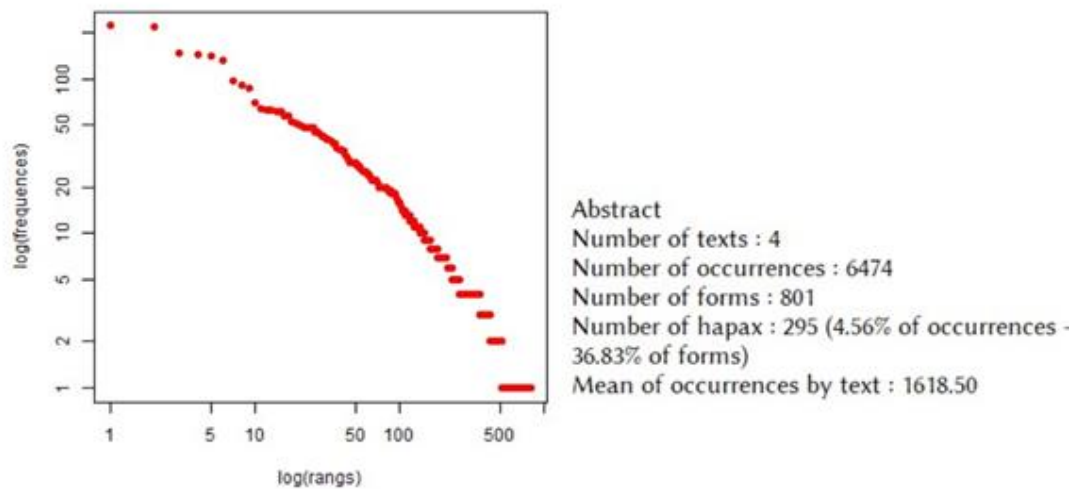
The study population is made up of institutional actors directly involved in the governance, administrative supervision, and territorial coordination of rural tourism in the Marrakech-Safi region. It includes, on the one hand, sectoral officials from the tourism administration, namely the Regional Delegate of Tourism of Marrakech, the Provincial Delegate of Tourism of Safi, and the Provincial Delegate of Tourism of Essaouira, and, on the other hand, a territorial coordinating authority represented by the Governor of Al Haouz Province. The choice of this population is justified by the strategic position these actors occupy in the design, implementation, monitoring, and orientation of public actions in support of rural tourism and social innovation. Indeed, these officials possess institutional knowledge of public mechanisms, territorial priorities, local governance arrangements, and the constraints framing tourism development initiatives. Their status also makes it possible to apprehend the interactions between administrative steering, territorial regulation, and the valorization of local resources. Thus, this population was not selected for its size, but for the qualitative relevance of its profiles, in line with the objective of the study, which seeks to analyze how public action mobilizes human, social, and cultural resources in rural tourism in Marrakech-Safi.

3. Methods (Qualitative Study)

3.1. Lexical Distribution

The analysis of the lexical frequency distribution figure highlights a discursive structuring characteristic of the human, social, and cultural resources mobilized by public action in support of social innovation in rural tourism. The log–log curve reveals a distribution consistent with Zipf’s law, indicating that a limited number of highly frequent lexical forms structure the core of the discourse, while a broader set of low-frequency forms introduces contextual variations specific to local experiences. This configuration, based on 6,474 occurrences distributed across 801 forms, with a high proportion of hapax representing 36.83% of the forms, simultaneously reflects strong thematic coherence and a diversity of expressions. The dominant lexical units refer to the human and cultural dimensions of change—such as public action, training, culture, territory, youth, women, and heritage—confirming their centrality in respondents’ representations. The observed lexical density suggests that intangible resources do not constitute a peripheral register, but rather a structuring core of discourses on social innovation. From the perspective of the theory of change, this lexical organization reflects the existence of stable intermediate mechanisms through which public action activates human and social capacities. The figure thus illustrates that the dynamics of rural tourism transformation are grounded in shared reference frameworks, while still allowing room for differentiated interpretations shaped by distinct territorial trajectories.

Figure 1. Lexical Distribution – Human and Cultural Resources for Social Innovation in Rural Tourist Areas



Building on this lexical structuring, the qualitative analysis highlights how human, social, and cultural resources emerge as decisive inputs within the causal chains of social change in rural tourism contexts. The collected discourses reflect a conception of public action centered on support, recognition, and the valorization of local potentials, rather than on a strictly top-down mode of intervention. The mobilization of youth appears as a lever for renewing practices, while women are identified as key actors in the transmission of know-how and cultural heritage. Community dynamics, grounded in cooperation and intergenerational learning, strengthen territories' capacity to integrate social innovation into sustainable practices. Within the logic of the theory of change, these intangible resources function as mediation mechanisms linking public intentions to observable social outcomes. They condition the appropriation of arrangements, the diffusion of innovations, and their territorial embeddedness. The study thus shows that social innovation in rural tourism cannot be dissociated from subjectivities, social relations, and local cultural references. When public action succeeds in activating these dimensions in an inclusive manner, human, social, and cultural resources become vectors of resilience and sustainable transformation, confirming their central role in territorial change processes.

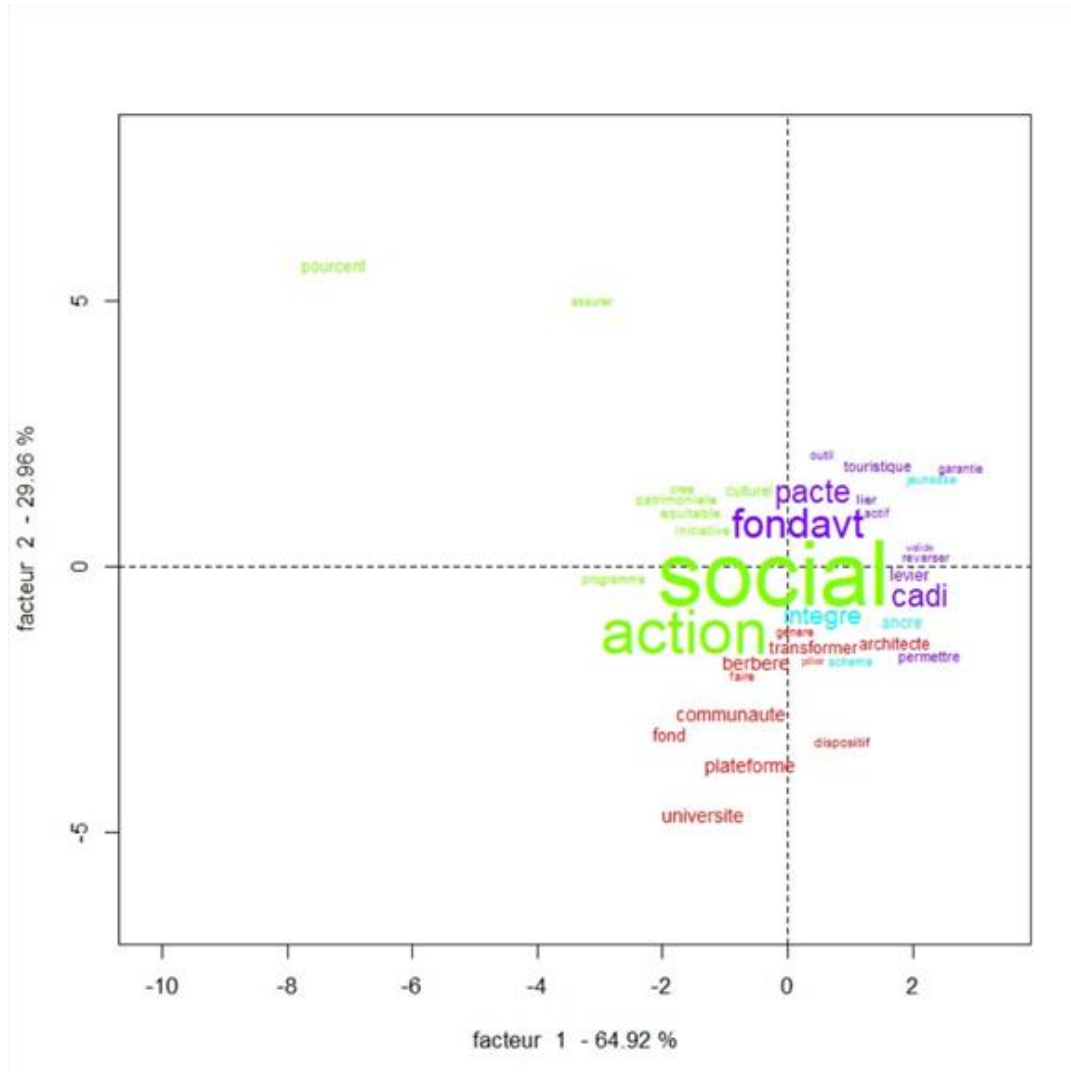
3.2. Correspondence Factor Analysis

The analysis of the figure derived from the correspondence factor analysis reveals a clear semantic structuring of the discourse related to the human, social, and cultural resources mobilized by public action in support of social innovation in rural tourism. Factor 1, which explains 64.92% of the total inertia, constitutes the main structuring axis of the lexical space. It contrasts two distinct registers. On the one hand, a pole marked by terms such as university, platform, community, transform, or arrangement, referring to logics of co-construction, collective learning, and social intermediation. These lexical forms reflect a conception of change based on the bottom-up mobilization of human and social resources, supported by educational and community-based partnerships. On the other hand, the same axis brings together a dense institutional lexicon around terms such as action, social, fondavt, pact, cadí, or program, which refer more to a structured mode of public intervention organized around standardized tools and administrative frameworks. This polarization reveals a central tension in the theory of change as applied to rural tourism: that between top-down public action focused on the engineering of arrangements and change dynamics grounded in the activation of local capacities. The lexical concen-



tration around these poles indicates that human and social resources are primarily apprehended through institutional frameworks, rather than as spontaneous initiatives emerging from territories.

Figure 2. Correspondence Factor Analysis – Human, Social and Cultural Resources Mobilized by Public Action in Rural Tourism



Factor 2, accounting for 29.96% of the inertia, introduces a secondary differentiation of the discourse, characterized by the isolation of certain lexical forms such as ensure or percent, which are relatively distant from the central semantic core. This dispersion suggests the existence of marginalized discursive registers, potentially related to technical or quantitative concerns that are less directly connected to the human and cultural dynamics of change. From the perspective of the theory of change, these elements appear weakly integrated into the causal chains of social innovation and do not structure clear intermediate mechanisms. Moreover, while terms such as youth, cultural, heritage, or initiative are present in the factorial space, their limited dispersion indicates that they remain subordinated to dominant institutional frameworks. Cultural resources, although acknowledged, do not constitute an autonomous axis structuring the discourse, revealing a still partial integration of identity-based and symbolic dimensions within public action. This configuration highlights a significant limitation: social innovation in rural tourism is largely conceived through organized arrangements, to the detriment of an explicit



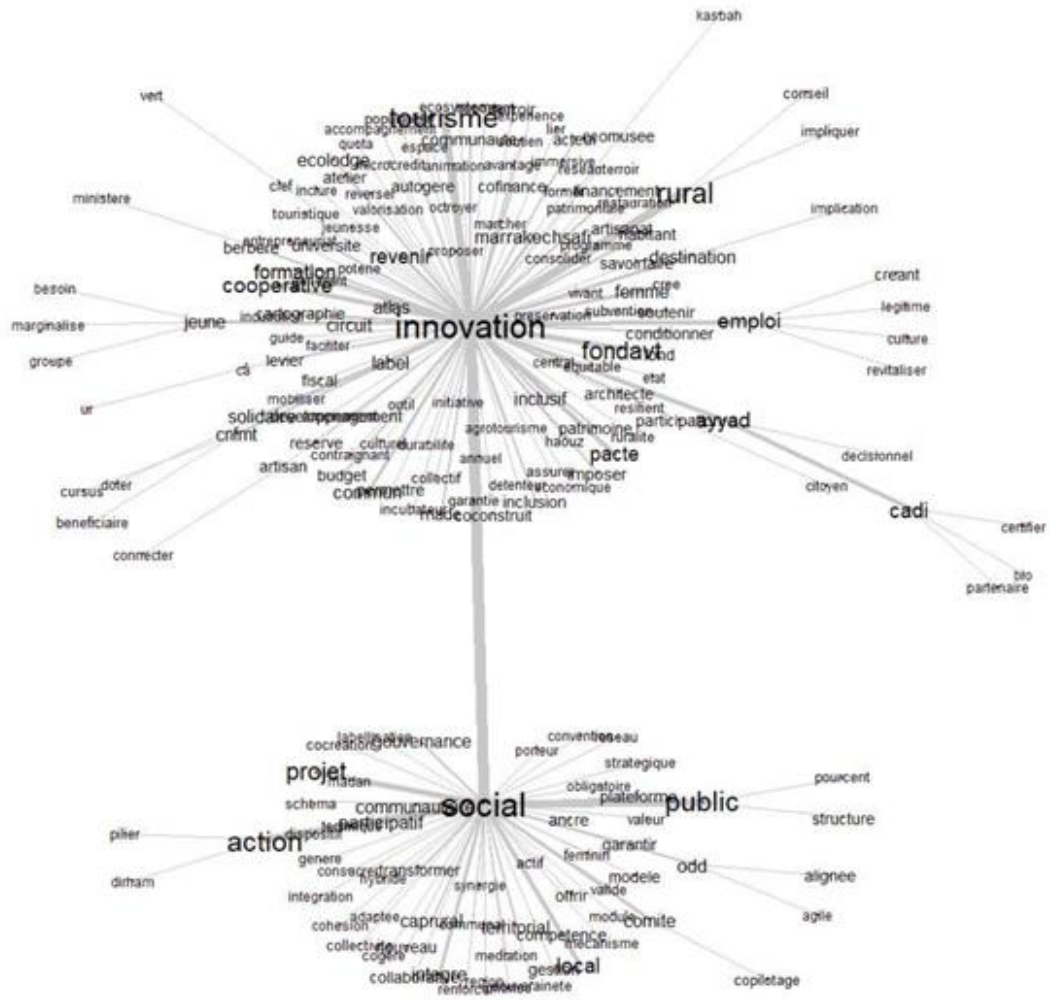
valorization of local knowledge, collective memories, and intergenerational dynamics. The correspondence factor analysis thus reveals an imbalance in the mobilization of human, social, and cultural resources, suggesting that public action still struggles to fully translate the principles of change into inclusive and endogenous territorial practices.

3.3. Similarity Analysis

The analysis of the figure derived from the similarity analysis highlights a lexical structuring that is strongly polarized around four central nodes: innovation, social, rural tourism, and public action. The graph reveals a dense core dominated by the term innovation, around which multiple lexical branches are organized, referring to the human, social, and cultural resources mobilized by public action. Connections established with terms such as training, circuit, heritage, fair, cooperative, or entrepreneurship reflect a conception of social innovation grounded in learning, the transmission of know-how, and the valorization of local resources. The social pole appears closely linked to notions such as project, community, governance, participation, and integration, underscoring the importance attributed to collective dynamics and territorial coordination mechanisms. The presence of the public action pole, connected to terms such as platform, model, strategy, or steering, confirms the structuring role of institutional arrangements in guiding and framing initiatives. Finally, the explicit link between rural tourism and cultural and heritage references illustrates the territorial embeddedness of social innovation processes. Within the logic of the theory of change, this lexical configuration highlights clear intermediate mechanisms, whereby public action acts as a catalyst linking human, social, and cultural resources to trajectories of sustainable tourism transformation.



Figure 3. Similarity Analysis – Lexicon of Human, Social and Cultural Resources Mobilized by Public Action in Rural Tourism



Beyond this central structuring, the figure nevertheless reveals certain fragilities in the transversal articulation of human, social, and cultural resources. Several peripheral themes appear weakly connected to the dominant nodes, particularly those related to intangible cultural forms, local memories, artistic expressions, or ritual practices. This low relational density suggests that these dimensions, although present in the discourses, are not yet fully integrated as levers of social innovation. Similarly, references to youth and women—identified as key actors of change within the theory of change—appear scattered and weakly structuring in the similarity graph. The role of the university, materialized by the term *cadi* and its connections with *certifier*, *université*, or *conseil*, confirms its positioning as an actor of professionalization and scientific legitimation. However, the relative distance between this academic pole and community-based segments indicates that the articulation between scientific knowledge and situated knowledge remains only partially achieved. From a theory of change perspective, this configuration underscores the need to strengthen bridges between public arrangements, academic institutions, and



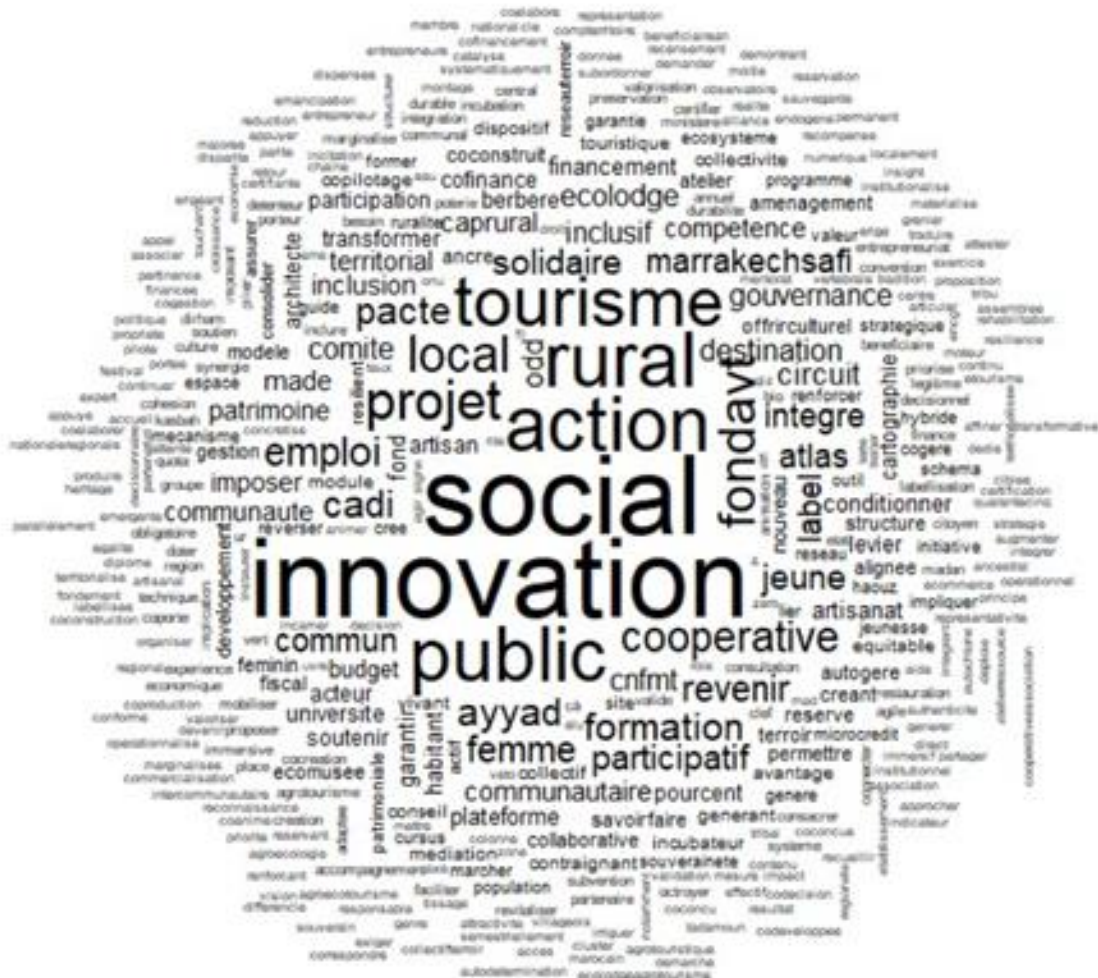
local actors. Public action would thus benefit from further supporting co-constructed approaches capable of valorizing existing human and cultural resources as endogenous drivers of social innovation in rural tourism.

3.4. Lexical Cloud

The analysis of the figure representing the lexical cloud highlights a discursive structuring that is strongly polarized around the notions of innovation, social, tourism, rural, action, and public, which constitute the semantic core of discourses related to the human, social, and cultural resources mobilized by public action. The size and centrality of these terms reflect a clear consensus among respondents regarding the structuring role of social innovation as a vector of transformation in rural territories. Surrounding this central core are words such as project, training, employment, cooperative, woman, artisan, circuit, or heritage, revealing the importance attributed to processes of empowerment, economic inclusion, and the valorization of local know-how. This lexical configuration reflects a conception of change in which human resources—through skills and knowledge transmission—social resources—through communities and collective organizational forms—and cultural resources—through heritage and local identities—are considered essential inputs. Within the logic of the theory of change, these elements function as intermediate levers linking public action to expected social outcomes. The lexical cloud thus illustrates an integrated vision of social innovation, grounded in the articulation between public action, community engagement, and the sustainable territorial embeddedness of rural tourism.



Figure 4. Lexical Cloud – Terminology of Sociocultural and Human Resources in Rural Tourism Framed by Public Action



The detailed analysis of the lexical cloud nevertheless reveals certain asymmetries in the mobilization of human, social, and cultural resources. Terms associated with the academic sphere, such as ayad, university, platform, or degree, although present, occupy a peripheral position relative to the central poles of the discourse. This configuration suggests that the role of the university in local dynamics of social innovation remains secondary, largely confined to functions of occasional support or certification rather than to a structural involvement in territorial processes. From a theory of change perspective, this relative distance reflects an incomplete articulation between scientific knowledge and situated knowledge. Moreover, deeper cultural dimensions—such as references to the kasbah, collective memory, or local identity—appear weakly visible and poorly connected to dominant terms. This lexical marginality indicates that intangible heritage, although acknowledged, has not yet become a fully integrated lever of public action. Yet, the theory of change emphasizes that the sustainability of social transformations depends on the recognition and activation of such symbolic resources. The lexical cloud thus highlights an imbalance between highly structured public arrangements and cultural resources that remain under-mobilized. It invites public action to strengthen the articulation between institutional engineering, academic knowledge, and local cultural heritage in order to consolidate



a form of social innovation that is genuinely inclusive and territorially embedded in rural tourism.

4. Discussion

The empirical findings show that, in the Marrakech–Safi region, social innovation in rural tourism relies above all on the effective mobilization of human, social, and cultural resources activated by public action. Lexical, factorial, and similarity analyses converge on the same conclusion: public arrangements generate transformative effects only when they succeed in activating intermediate mechanisms linked to local skills, community dynamics, and territorial cultural references. Within the logic of the theory of change, these resources appear as essential intangible inputs, conditioning the transition from public intentions to observable social outcomes. The results notably indicate that training, the inclusion of women and youth, cooperative structuring, and the valorization of artisanal know-how constitute central levers of transformation. However, this mobilization remains largely framed by formalized institutional arrangements, such as public programs, financing mechanisms, or coordination platforms. This configuration reveals a form of public action oriented more toward project engineering than toward stimulating spontaneous endogenous dynamics. In the rural context of Marrakech–Safi, characterized by strong social and cultural diversity, this approach tends to privilege actors already endowed with organizational capacities, thereby limiting the broader appropriation of social innovations. The findings thus underscore that the success of social innovation policies depends less on the multiplication of tools than on their capacity to sustainably activate local human and social resources.

The discussion also highlights several structural limitations in the integration of cultural and cognitive resources at the core of the causal chains of change. Although heritage, local identity, and cultural references are present in the discourses, their weak structuring in factorial and similarity analyses indicates that they remain secondary dimensions of public action. In the Marrakech–Safi region, despite its rich tangible and intangible heritage, this under-mobilization constrains the transformative potential of social innovation. Likewise, the role of the university—identified through references to Cadi Ayyad University—appears still peripheral, largely confined to certification functions or occasional support. Yet, from a theory of change perspective, the articulation between scientific knowledge, situated knowledge, and territorial practices constitutes a key mechanism of learning and feedback. The absence of strong bridges between these registers reduces the capacity for adaptation and diffusion of social innovations. The results thus suggest an imbalance between highly structured public action and cultural and cognitive resources that are insufficiently integrated as endogenous levers of change. To strengthen the sustainability of transformations in rural tourism in Marrakech–Safi, public action would benefit from moving beyond a predominantly top-down logic by promoting co-constructed, inclusive, and culturally grounded approaches capable of turning human, social, and cultural resources into genuine drivers of territorial resilience.

Conclusion

This study aimed to analyze how public action mobilizes human, social, and cultural resources to support social innovation in rural tourism in the Marrakech–Safi region, using the theory of change as the analytical framework. The findings show that these intangible resources constitute decisive inputs within the causal chains of change, conditioning local appropriation and the sustainability of public arrangements. Qualitative analyses reveal a strong centrality of human and social dimensions, notably through training, the inclusion of women and youth, cooperative structuring, and community dynamics. Public action emerges as an essential catalyst, playing a



role of coordination, recognition, and support for territorial actors. However, the study also highlights the predominance of formalized institutional frameworks in the implementation of social innovation, which sometimes limits the emergence of genuinely endogenous dynamics. Within the logic of the theory of change, this configuration indicates that the intermediate mechanisms linking public intentions to social outcomes rely more on the engineering of arrangements than on the spontaneous activation of local capacities. Thus, while social innovation in rural tourism in Marrakech–Safi is indeed supported by public action, its transformative scope depends closely on the latter’s ability to durably integrate human and social resources as central drivers of territorial change.

The conclusion also sheds light on the challenges related to the incomplete mobilization of cultural and cognitive resources within social innovation processes. Despite the rich patrimonial and identity-based assets of the Marrakech–Safi region, the results show that deeper cultural dimensions remain weakly structured within the causal chains of change. Similarly, the role of the university, although acknowledged, remains largely peripheral, confined to support or legitimation functions without genuine integration into bottom-up territorial dynamics. From a theory of change perspective, this situation limits opportunities for collective learning, feedback, and policy adaptation. The study therefore underscores the need to strengthen bridges between scientific knowledge, local knowledge, and social practices, in order to transform cultural and cognitive resources into endogenous levers of change. For social innovation to fully contribute to the sustainability of rural tourism, public action must move beyond a predominantly top-down logic and promote co-constructed, inclusive, and culturally grounded approaches. By more evenly integrating human, social, and cultural resources into change mechanisms, public policies can enhance territorial resilience and support sustainable tourism development trajectories that are adapted to the social and cultural specificities of the Marrakech–Safi region.

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