

Exploring Social Entrepreneurship Dynamics in Sustainable Tourism: A Case Study of Morocco's Al Haouz Province

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Abstract: **Background:** Many now recognize social entrepreneurship as an effective strategy to address social and environmental challenges while promoting economic development.

Research objectives: This study aims to examine the objectives, strategies, and outcomes of social entrepreneurs operating in the tourism sector in Al Haouz Province, Morocco.

Research design and methods: The research employed a qualitative approach to explore various social enterprises engaged in sustainable tourism, including community-based tourism initiatives, eco-lodges, and fair-trade handicraft cooperatives.

Results: Findings indicate that social entrepreneurs implement diverse strategies to enhance social inclusion and sustainability in tourism. Key approaches include community involvement, capacity building, cultural preservation, and ethical tourism practices. The study also identifies critical factors that influence the success of social entrepreneurship in sustainable tourism.

Conclusions: The research highlights the importance of fostering an enabling environment for social entrepreneurship in tourism. Policy recommendations focus on the development of financial mechanisms, capacity-building programs, and regulatory frameworks to support social enterprises in this sector.

Keywords: social entrepreneurship, sustainable tourism, community development

JEL Codes: L31, L83, Q56, O18

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Over the last two decades, research on social entrepreneurship (SE) has grown steadily. The concept has attracted the interest of academics and practitioners alike (Dacin et al., 2011; Dwivedi & Weerawardena, 2018; Rey-Martí et al., 2016; Zahra et al., 2009). It has emerged as a strategic response to the imperative for the development of community-centric tourism. This approach entails the application of innovative and socially responsible business practices, with the overarching goal of addressing the needs and challenges inherent in local communities (Halaissi & Benalla, 2024). It seeks to establish a symbiotic relationship between economic development through tourism and the cultivation of positive social and environmental impacts (Stasik & Dańkowska, 2024). In this context, the essence of social entrepreneurship lies in fostering sustainable and inclusive tourism practices that prioritize community empower-

ment, cultural preservation, and the promotion of responsible tourism behavior (Aquino et al., 2022). Usually driven by individuals known as social entrepreneurs (Dees, 1998), this approach has more recently gained momentum through the involvement of non-governmental organizations (Halaissi & Benalla, 2024). In the tourism sector, social entrepreneurship responds to the growing demand for community-centered development, blending innovative business practices with social responsibility (i.e. Bruque Camara et al., 2021; Dahles et al., 2020; Aquino et al., 2022). Social entrepreneurship embodies the innovative use of business strategies to address pressing societal and environmental challenges, creating positive social change (Stasik & Dańkowska, 2024). Some of these practices, which focus specifically on the problems of the world's poor and marginalized populations, have succeeded in transforming the lives of thousands worldwide (Alvord et al., 2004; Austin et al., 2006). Within the realm of sustainable tourism, social entrepreneurship plays a pivotal role in fostering inclusive growth, community empowerment, and environmental conservation. It integrates economic viability with social and environmental objectives, aiming to benefit local communities and ecosystems.

Statement of Purpose

This study comprehensively investigates the dynamics of social entrepreneurship within the sustainable tourism sector of Morocco's Al Haouz Province. It seeks to understand how social entrepreneurship contributes to sustainable tourism development in the region by analyzing the goals, tactics, and outcomes of social enterprises operating there. The research aims to shed light on the effectiveness and impact of social entrepreneurship in the context of sustainable tourism.

Research Objectives

To examine social entrepreneurship dynamics: To delve into the objectives, strategies, and operational dynamics of social enterprises engaged in sustainable tourism in Al Haouz Province.

To evaluate impact and outcomes: To assess the tangible outcomes and socio-environmental impacts of social entrepreneurship initiatives on local communities, ecosystems, and the sustainable tourism sector.

To identify key success factors: To analyze the critical elements that contribute to the success and sustainability of social entrepreneurship endeavors in the context of sustainable tourism in Al Haouz.

To recommend policy and practical interventions: To formulate evidence-based recommendations to create an enabling environment that fosters the growth and effectiveness of social entrepreneurship within sustainable tourism, including funding mechanisms, capacity-building programs, and regulatory frameworks.

To promote awareness and knowledge sharing: To disseminate findings and insights to stakeholders such as policymakers, practitioners, local communities, and academia, facilitating informed decision-making and knowledge exchange for further advancement in sustainable tourism through social entrepreneurship.

Literature Review

Social Entrepreneurship: A Catalyst for Growth in Emerging Economies

In the pursuit of equitable and sustainable development, social entrepreneurship functions as a catalyst for positive change (Sharma & Kumar, 2019). This fusion of commercial acumen with social consciousness offers a practical solution to address significant societal and environmental challenges, driving inclusive growth and economic development in emerging nations (Dees, 1998).

Social ventures actively create employment opportunities by responding to unmet needs and encouraging local innovation, particularly within marginalized communities (Ćwiek et al., 2021). Moreover, these endeavors promote inclusive development by targeting underserved populations, facilitating access to resources, and reducing poverty and income inequality (Kowalska & Szyja, 2023; Szczygieł & Śliwa, 2023). Additionally, the inherently collaborative nature of social entrepreneurship nurtures trust and community collaboration, fostering stable and productive economic environments (Putnam, 2000).

Framed within an ethical framework, many now recognize social entrepreneurship as a transformative mechanism for promoting equitable and sustainable growth in emerging economies (Wronka-Pośpiech, 2024). This review explores distinct mechanisms through three lenses – socio-economic, territorial, and sustainable justice – with compelling examples from diverse global contexts that illustrate the power of social ventures in driving positive change.

Socio-Economic Lens

Empowering Marginalized Communities. The Grameen Bank's pioneering microfinance initiatives in Bangladesh serve as a seminal model, providing financial accessibility to women and marginalized populations, and contributing to poverty alleviation and economic stability (Szczygieł & Śliwa, 2023).

Ethical Job Creation. Café Femenino in Guatemala stands as a paragon, championing fair labor practices, safe working conditions, and organic farming, thereby empowering women involved in the coffee production sector. This initiative not only highlights the principles of ethical job creation but also underscores the transformative potential of social entrepreneurship to drive economic empowerment and gender equity (Schwab & Davis, 2017).

Territorial Lens

Revitalizing Disadvantaged Territories. Selco India's solar energy solutions have revitalized rural areas, particularly by improving electricity access and stimulating sustainable development in remote regions (Pati & Garud, 2011). Research by Joshi and Yenneti (2020) and Minas et al. (2024) documents similar sustainable energy projects that have positively impacted marginalized regions across various countries.

Responsible Resource Management. The community forestry in Nepal advocates for community-based forest management, emphasizing biodiversity preservation and equitable resource allocation (Pandey and Paudyal, 2015). Studies by Ash-Shiddiqie, (2025), Ibbih and Nyako (2024) and Osazuwa et al. (2024) stress the significance of community engagement and sustainable resource management in environmental conservation efforts.

Sustainable Justice Lens

Challenging Inequitable Power Structures. Deeply rooted in Africa and Latin America, Fair-trade International actively promotes ethical trade practices that support producers within global supply chains while challenging exploitative systems (Agyeman & Evans, 2004). Academic analyses by Barro-Chale et al. (2023) and Neilsno and Pritchard (2010) affirm the impact of fair-trade initiatives in fostering ethical business practices and social justice.

Promoting Ecological Justice. The Green Belt Movement in Kenya, founded by Nobel laureate Wangari Maathai, combats deforestation while empowering women through community-driven tree planting initiatives (Gebeyehu et al., 2019). Research by Sele (2023) and highlights similar community-led environmental initiatives and their role in promoting sustainability and environmental justice.

In conclusion, social entrepreneurship, firmly rooted in ethical commitments to sustainability and social justice, emerges as a powerful catalyst for equitable and sustainable growth in emerging economies. Drawing on insights from Africa, Asia, and South America, social ventures have the potential to uplift communities, rejuvenate neglected territories, challenge unjust systems, and champion environmental conservation. This underscores the need for collaborative efforts among governments, investors, and support organizations to reinforce and sustain this ethical engine for comprehensive growth, promising a prosperous future for all stakeholders (Wronka-Pościech, 2024).

Social Entrepreneurship and Sustainable Tourism

Social entrepreneurship endeavors to develop income-generating activities adapted to the specificities of each territory. For instance, in Indonesia, SE promotes ecotourism through social enterprises, which not only raises travelers' awareness about the importance of environmental conservation but also supports the territory's economic development and improves the local population's well-being (Situmorang & Mirzanti, 2012). SE plays a pivotal role in sustaining tourist areas by mitigating the negative impacts of mass tourism. It strengthens the resilience of these regions by enhancing their appeal despite the strain of large-scale tourism and employing practices that optimize the utilization of limited resources. This creates enduring competitive advantage and social value for local communities (Halaissi & Benalla, 2024). Moreover, SE drives the emergence of innovative tourist niches such as "volunteer tourism," eco-tourism, and cultural tourism. These initiatives contribute to the development of local tourism projects by training agents and networks, minimizing risks, and sharing expertise while maximizing the well-being of the local population.

Furthermore, SE has demonstrated its positive impact on local communities through sustainable tourism activities. It fosters alternative local networks, reducing the involvement of intermediaries in the tourism industry, which increases income for local populations. By promoting sustainable tourism, SE stimulates the development of systems that curtail the adverse externalities associated with mass tourism. It skillfully integrates sustainable tourism practices and principles into the creation of economic value within the sector. In essence, SE serves as a tool that enhances sustainability in tourist regions by diminishing their reliance on major tourist groups. Through comprehensive processes revitalizing the tourist experience in these regions, SE designs innovative tourism products that enrich tourists' experiences and offer additional benefits to the local population. By tailoring products to a globally distressed mar-

ket, SE effectively showcases a region's unique attributes through innovative offerings that attract tourists (Bacq et al., 2015).

Moreover, SE significantly contributes to the economic development of rural territories by introducing novel information and communication technologies. These technologies aid rural communities in accessing information relevant to their economic activities (Gebeyehu et al., 2019). Additionally, by building rural women's capabilities, SE facilitates the creation of sustainable micro-enterprises, improving living standards and promoting better hygiene practices (Pati & Garud, 2011). Through social innovation, SE ensures the sustainability of its economic endeavors. In this context, sustainability refers to an organization's capacity to endure within the market while consistently generating social value (Halaissi & Benalla, 2024). By blending technical expertise with a social entrepreneurial spirit, SE secures the durability of economic activities, thereby contributing to the stability of the generated impact (Gebeyehu et al., 2019).

Furthermore, social entrepreneurship enables the decoupling of economic growth from environmental pressures, concurrently positively affecting the environment through cost reduction methods and innovative, adaptable strategies. Initiatives led by social enterprises not only transform the local landscape but also uplift local communities' living standards, offering employment opportunities and generating stable incomes (Azmat, 2013). On the environmental front, social enterprises have managed to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions, prevent the spread of diseases, and enhance soil quality and productivity (Azmat, 2013).

The integration of social entrepreneurship into local contexts significantly reduces poverty among local populations while bolstering environmental sustainability. A case study by Azmat (2013) illustrates how environmentally sensitive agricultural methods of a village-based social enterprise, coupled with the use of natural and ancestral techniques, improve soil productivity and sustainability, effectively addressing poverty and famine. SE also optimizes economic activities like ecotourism, which serve as vehicles for traveler enlightenment, disseminating practices that strengthen environmental resilience and community well-being (Situmorang & Mirzanti, 2012). By efficiently harnessing endogenous resources, SE generates sustainable added value, reinforcing its influence at the territorial level. As an alternative to traditional market mechanisms and state interventions, SE tailors goods and services to meet the needs of local populations (Situmorang & Mirzanti, 2012). Through collective action and market-oriented approaches, SE initiatives strategically target social and economic challenges (Seelos et al., 2011).

Research Design and Methods

This research adopts a qualitative case study approach to explore the dynamics of social entrepreneurship in the context of sustainable tourism development in Morocco's Al Haouz Province (Yin, 2018). We chose a case study design due to its suitability for in-depth examination of specific phenomena within their natural settings, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of social entrepreneurial initiatives in the sustainable tourism sector (Creswell, 2013).

Case Selection and Presentation

We selected Al Haouz Province as the primary case because of its prominence as a hub for tourism activities in Morocco and the presence of diverse social entrepreneurship initiatives aimed at sustainable tourism development. This choice enables a nuanced exploration of

various social entrepreneurial ventures and their impact on the sustainable tourism landscape within the region (Echtner & Jamal, 1997).

Data Collection

Primary data collection involved the following methods:

Interviews: Following Bryman (2016) recommendations, we conducted semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders including social entrepreneurs, local community members, government representatives, and non-governmental organization (NGO) leaders involved in sustainable tourism initiatives in Al Haouz Province (Bryman, 2016). These interviews aimed to collect information about the motivations, challenges, strategies, and outcomes of social entrepreneurial endeavors in the sector (Creswell, 2013).

Observations: We carried out on-site observations to understand the operational dynamics of social enterprises, stakeholder interactions, and the integration of sustainable practices into tourism activities (Patton, 2015). This approach provided firsthand insights into the context in which social entrepreneurship operates within the tourism sector.

We also used some sources as secondary data:

Document analysis: We reviewed academic literature, government reports, organizational publications, and online resources to gather secondary data on the historical background, policies, and existing studies related to sustainable tourism and social entrepreneurship in Morocco, particularly in Al Haouz Province (Gerring, 2007).

Data Analysis

Thematic coding: We thematically coded transcriptions from interviews, field notes, and document analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). We will identify and categorize common themes, patterns, and key concepts related to social entrepreneurship in sustainable tourism using the qualitative data analysis software (Charmaz, 2014).

Cross-case analysis: We employed comparative analysis to examine similarities and differences among various social entrepreneurial initiatives in Al Haouz Province (Yin, 2018). This comparative approach helped uncover overarching patterns and unique aspects of the ventures.

Results and Discussion

Through our analysis, we found that social enterprises represent a diverse sector that balances social, environmental, and commercial objectives. Within sustainable tourism, various organizational forms, such as community-based tourism programs, eco-lodges, and fair-trade cooperatives for handicrafts, align social and environmental goals with financial sustainability. These different forms respond to specific challenges while promoting sustainable tourism. This research deepens understanding of the dynamics of social entrepreneurship in the context of sustainable tourism. Investigating goals, tactics, and outcomes unveils nuanced strategies that harmonize economic viability with broader social and environmental aims (Ochoa Jiménez et al., 2022). Employing qualitative methods ensures a comprehensive analysis grounded in the regional context of Al Haouz Province.

Al Haouz Province in Morocco presents a varied and burgeoning landscape of social entrepreneurship initiatives operating within the realm of sustainable tourism. In this setting, numerous ventures have emerged with a primary focus on blending profitability with social and envi-

ronmental impact. These projects often originate from local communities, non-governmental organizations, and entrepreneurial entities driven by the ethos of fostering positive change through tourism. The initiatives span a broad spectrum, encompassing community-based tourism enterprises, eco-lodges, cultural immersion programs, and responsible travel agencies. They typically emphasize the preservation of local heritage, promotion of environmental conservation, empowerment of marginalized groups, and equitable distribution of economic benefits within the community.

In Al Haouz Province, social entrepreneurship plays a pivotal role in addressing social, environmental, and economic challenges associated with sustainable tourism. Strategies centered on community empowerment, social inclusion, and sustainability prove critical. We describe the employed tactics below.

Stakeholder Participation: Fostering Inclusivity and Collaboration

Local community engagement: Involving communities directly in decision-making fosters empowerment.

Tourist involvement: Encouraging responsible behavior among tourists cultivates shared responsibility.

Holistic participation: Inclusive stakeholder engagement aligns social and environmental goals, ensuring shared benefits.

Access to Funding: Empowering Sustainable Initiatives

Diverse funding sources: Access to grants, private investments, and partnerships supports sustainable projects.

Community investments: Financial support bolsters eco-lodges, handicraft cooperatives, and educational programs, driving economic growth and cultural preservation.

Supportive Institutional Frameworks: Legal and Regulatory Enablers

Regulatory support: Policies combine tourism activities with sustainability goals, expediting responsible operations.

Government and NGO involvement: Collaborative actions ensure regulatory compliance, fostering holistic development.

Qualitative research conducted in Al Haouz Province revealed multifaceted findings regarding the goals, tactics, and outcomes of social entrepreneurship activities in sustainable tourism. The primary goals identified among social entrepreneurs revolve around:

- Community empowerment: Initiatives aimed to empower local communities by providing opportunities for skill development, job creation, and entrepreneurship among marginalized groups;
- Environmental conservation: Efforts dedicated to environmental sustainability through eco-friendly practices, conservation projects, and awareness campaigns on responsible tourism;
- Cultural preservation: Initiatives focused on preserving indigenous cultures, traditions, and heritage while promoting cultural exchange and understanding among tourists.

Social entrepreneurs' tactics encompass a range of strategies: community engagement programs, capacity-building workshops, partnerships with local stakeholders, sustainable resource management practices, and the creation of unique tourism experiences rooted in local culture and traditions. Regarding outcomes, these initiatives have demonstrated tangible

impacts, including more economic opportunities for local communities, preservation of natural and cultural heritage, increased environmental awareness, and strengthened social cohesion in communities involved in sustainable tourism activities.

Social entrepreneurs in Al Haouz Province apply several strategies to foster social inclusion, ensure sustainability, and engage the community effectively in the tourism sector. These strategies include:

- Collaborative partnerships: Forming alliances with local communities, government bodies, NGOs, and businesses to ensure a collaborative approach toward sustainable tourism development;
- Capacity building and education: Providing training, education, and skill development programs to help local communities participate in and benefit from tourism-related activities;
- Promotion of responsible practices: Advocating and adopting responsible tourism strategies among tourists and local stakeholders to minimize negative impacts on the environment and culture;
- Inclusive decision-making processes: Encouraging participatory decision-making that engages community members in planning, implementing, and managing tourism initiatives;
- Value chain integration: Creating inclusive value chains that prioritize the involvement of local artisans, producers, and service providers to secure equitable distribution of benefits from tourism.

These strategies collectively support the extensive objectives of social inclusion, sustainability, and community involvement, thereby fostering a more holistic and responsible approach to tourism development in Al Haouz Province.

Discussion

The study in Al Haouz Province echoes recent literature that emphasizes the centrality of community engagement in successful social entrepreneurship initiatives within emerging tourism economies. Both the research and existing literature highlight the importance of empowering local communities through involvement in decision-making, capacity building, and equitable benefit-sharing mechanisms. However, nuances exist in how different contexts prioritize and implement community engagement strategies, influenced by cultural values, historical backgrounds, and socio-economic disparities.

Literature from across emerging economies and the findings from Al Haouz Province converge on the pivotal role of partnerships and collaborative networks in advancing social entrepreneurship in sustainable tourism (Hall & Williams, 2021). The study supports the growing consensus on the need to forge alliances with diverse stakeholders. Nevertheless, the nature and depth of these partnerships often vary, shaped by institutional structures, power dynamics, and the level of trust among stakeholders in each context.

Both the study and recent literature underscore innovation and adaptability as critical drivers of success in social entrepreneurship within the tourism sector (Novelli et al., 2018). The ability to innovate and respond to evolving market demands, technological advancements, and environmental challenges stands out as essential. Still, contextual factors that influence relevant strategies may differ, leading to different types and degrees of innovation across emerging economies.

The results from Al Haouz Province align with literature that highlights the role of supportive policy frameworks and advocacy efforts in nurturing social entrepreneurship in tourism (Aquino et al., 2018). Both point to the significance of government action, regulatory support, and advocacy programs in creating an enabling environment. However, variations exist in the extent and nature of government involvement, policy coherence, and advocacy strategies across different contexts, impacting the effectiveness of interventions.

By synthesizing insights from the Al Haouz Province case study and recent literature, several recommendations emerge:

- Funding mechanisms: Establish diverse funding channels to sustain social enterprises and community projects;
- Capacity-building programs: Offer skill enhancement programs to empower communities for active participation and cultural preservation;
- Regulatory frameworks: Implement sound regulations, backed by both governmental and non-governmental institutions, to enable responsible and sustainable tourism practices (Aquino et al., 2018);
- Contextualized approaches: Encourage social entrepreneurs in Al Haouz Province to leverage global best practices while adapting strategies to suit local socio-cultural and environmental contexts;
- Collaborative learning platforms: Create platforms for cross-contextual learning and knowledge exchange between entrepreneurs, policymakers, and researchers across emerging economies to foster mutual learning and innovative approaches;
- Policy dialogues and adaptations: Facilitate policy dialogue and the exchange of successful policy interventions among emerging economy governments to adapt them in different settings;
- Research and evaluation: Support ongoing research and evaluation to better understand the evolving dynamics of social entrepreneurship in sustainable tourism, advancing evidence-based policy-making and entrepreneurial practices.

Conclusions

The landscape of social entrepreneurship in sustainable tourism within Al Haouz Province showcases a vibrant tapestry of initiatives that prioritize social impact alongside economic viability. Through qualitative research, the study clarifies the goals, tactics, and outcomes of these initiatives, highlighting the multifaceted strategies social entrepreneurs employ to achieve social inclusion, sustainability, and community engagement in the tourism sector. These efforts collectively demonstrate the transformative potential of social entrepreneurship in shaping a more equitable and sustainable tourism model for the region. Thus, social entrepreneurship emerges as a successful strategy capable of addressing complex social and environmental challenges while stimulating economic development. Its role in promoting inclusive growth, community empowerment, and environmental preservation stands out within the sustainable tourism domain. Hence, with its dynamic strategies and innovative approaches, social entrepreneurship serves as a powerful catalyst for positive change in this remarkable region. By integrating these strategies effectively, Al Haouz Province can transcend boundaries and set a paradigm for sustainable and socially responsible tourism on a global scale.

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Conflict of Interest

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