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Sarhan Abdennadher [α] & Sami Boudabbous [σ]

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Sfax stands out for its potential to become an innovation hub, but this requires better synergy between companies, training institutions and public actors. Indeed, the development of Sfax is based on an integrated approach combining skills management, organizational innovation and participatory governance of LPS. This model offers avenues for sustainable growth, while opening up perspectives for future research on social capital and regional comparisons.

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I. Introduction

Pioneering work in strategy, seeking to understand the determining factors of business performance, initially focused on the structural characteristics of the industry (Ali et al., 2017). The structure-conduct-performance paradigm, originating from industrial economics, considered external elements, such as competition, market size or barriers to entry, as primary determinants of competitiveness and financial results (Bourai et al., 2024). However, this theoretical framework quickly showed its limits in the face of empirical observations demonstrating that companies operating in similar environments displayed radically different performances (Brooks & Oikonomou, 2018).

Indeed, the work of Barney (2007) laid the foundations of the Resource-Based View (RBV) approach, which marked a major turning point in strategic management (Bertram & Bertram, 2016). This perspective places firms' internal resources at the center of the analysis. According to this theory, organizations capable of effectively identifying, acquiring, and mobilizing strategic resources- that is, unique, rare, difficult-to-imitate, and optimally organized resources- can generate a sustainable competitive advantage (Barney, 2007). The RBV has been the subject of numerous enrichments, including the integration of dynamic capabilities, allowing firms to adapt and innovate in constantly changing environments (Helfat & Martin, 2015). In parallel, the RBV has been expanded to analyze territories, considered as ecosystems with specific resources (Gueler & Schneider, 2021; Lopes et al., 2021). This work is based on the idea that, just like firms, territories can mobilize strategic resources to improve their competitiveness. The concepts of "territorial capital" and "territorial skills" have thus emerged, highlighting the importance of interactions between local actors, infrastructures and institutions in territorial performance (Camagni & Capello, 2013; Crescenzi & Rodríguez-Pose, 2011).

In this perspective, the role of the entrepreneur is central since he acts as a catalyst, capable of identifying and transforming available resources into concrete development opportunities (Leong, 2024; Khan, 2023). His skills, such as innovation, leadership and the ability to build networks, are major levers in the process of creating territorial value (Ferdj, 2024; Secundo et al., 2015). Studies have also shown that entrepreneurs are essential for stimulating cooperation in LPS, by facilitating the emergence of industrial clusters and collaborative ecosystems (Hasan et al., 2024).

In the case of the territory of Sfax, these dynamics are of particular importance. Sfax is one of the main economic hubs of Tunisia, with a rich diversity of natural, human and institutional resources. However, the economic performance of this territory cannot be reduced to its intrinsic characteristics. It largely depends on the ability of local entrepreneurs to mobilize these resources and innovate in a globalized and competitive environment (Gafsi, 2024).

It is in this context that this contribution is made, which seeks to explore the role of entrepreneurial skills as well as the mobilization of local resources in the territorial performance of Sfax.

This article answers these questions in several stages. First, we analyze, from a theoretical point of view, entrepreneurial skills and their role in local systems. Then, we explore the fundamental principles of

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the RBV and its applications at the level of companies and territories. This analysis is completed by a presentation of the main theories relating to organizational and territorial performance. Finally, we present the results of a survey conducted in the Sfax region, aimed at identifying the interactions between the role of entrepreneurial skills, local resources, LPS and territorial performance.

II. Literature Review

a) *Entrepreneurial skills*

The term "entrepreneur" remains a complex concept and difficult to define universally. Although many attempts have been made to grasp its exact meaning, it remains a subject of debate among researchers and practitioners. This ambiguity is reflected in the diversity of definitions of the term, which can vary depending on the times and contexts. Indeed, the entrepreneur is often perceived as a key player in the economy, acting as a driver of innovation and economic growth, but his profile remains difficult to precisely define. This difficulty lies largely in the multiplicity of characteristics associated with the entrepreneur, which are influenced by social, economic and technological developments. According to Ireland et al. (2003), the entrepreneur is a person capable of seizing market opportunities and mobilizing the resources necessary to exploit them. However, this capacity varies considerably depending on the specific skills he develops during his career. Entrepreneurial skills have been at the center of entrepreneurship studies, especially since the beginning of the 21st century (Kuratko, 2005). One of the first attempts to describe these skills was the work of Chandler and Jansen (1992), who proposed a classification into three categories: entrepreneurial skills, managerial skills, and technical-functional skills (Pepple & Enuoh, 2020). These skills are considered essential elements for success in the field of entrepreneurship (Pennetta et al., 2024). Entrepreneurial skills, which include the ability to identify and seize opportunities, are central to the entrepreneurial process. These refer to the ability to identify market niches, develop strategies to enter them, and transform an idea into a viable project. Managerial skills, which concern human resource management, coordination of activities, and team leadership, are also crucial. Technical-functional skills include mastery of management tools and techniques, particularly in the financial, commercial and human resources management fields, which have become essential levers in an increasingly competitive environment (Helfat and Martin, 2015). Contemporary research on entrepreneurial skills has helped redefine and broaden this concept to include behavioral and psychological skills. These behavioral skills are linked to traits such as resilience, the ability to make decisions under uncertainty, and stress management (Johannisson, 2017). Psychological skills include elements such as self-confidence, the ability to tolerate ambiguity, and the ability to learn from mistakes (Iakovleva et al., 2011). These skills are particularly crucial in a constantly changing entrepreneurial environment. Indeed, entrepreneurs are often faced with uncertain situations, in which they must be able to make quick decisions while strategically minimizing risks (Abdennadher & Boudabbous, 2023). According to Shan et al. (2016), this decision-making agility is a key element of entrepreneurial success.

In more recent work, notably that of Gueler and Schneider (2021), the importance of integrating entrepreneurial skills into the local ecosystem has been highlighted. These authors assert that the entrepreneur cannot succeed alone; he must mobilize not only his personal skills, but also those of a network of local actors who interact to stimulate competitiveness. In addition, according to the research of Lopes et al. (2021), entrepreneurs have a particular responsibility in creating value for their community by taking advantage of locally available resources, whether human talent, financing or infrastructure. The entrepreneur thus becomes a catalyst for innovation, not only through his own activity, but also through his interactions with other economic actors in the territory (Johannisson, 2017). This local dimension of entrepreneurship is particularly important for understanding how entrepreneurial skills translate into territorial impacts. Entrepreneurial skills are also influenced by an entrepreneur's ability to evolve in a constantly changing environment. According to Secundo et al. (2015), successful entrepreneurs are those who have a long-term vision and are able to reinvent themselves in the face of economic challenges. This includes managing uncertainty, the ability to take calculated risks and invest in long-term projects. In this context, skills related to knowledge management, adaptability and innovation become essential elements for success (Johannisson, 2017). These skills are all the more crucial in a context where technological innovations are rapidly changing the conditions of competition, particularly through the digitalization of economic processes. Thus, the entrepreneur must constantly learn and adapt to remain competitive in an increasingly interconnected and globalized world. Helfat and Martin (2015) explain that companies that manage to maintain dynamic capabilities – the ability to adapt to new market conditions – are better placed to cope with economic turbulence.

From this perspective, mastery of technical skills, while essential, is no longer sufficient. The entrepreneur must be able to navigate complex networks of partners and local actors to capture strategic resources and information. This interaction between the entrepreneur and their local environment creates what is called an "entrepreneurial ecosystem", which promotes innovation and competitiveness (Gueler and Schneider,

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2021). By mobilizing the territory's resources, the entrepreneur creates synergies with other companies, institutions or researchers, thereby strengthening the territory's collective performance. These networks also make it possible to accelerate access to new technologies, new knowledge and new markets. According to Lopes et al. (2021), such an ecosystem is essential for the development of a dynamic and innovative local economy.

The impact of entrepreneurial skills on the performance of a territory is all the more important as it can influence the economic structure of an entire region. As Gueler and Schneider (2021) indicate, the entrepreneur becomes a strategic player in the transformation of the territory, by contributing to the diversification of economic activities and job creation. Indeed, entrepreneurial skills influence not only the competitiveness of companies, but also the capacity of territories to attract investments and develop infrastructure adapted to the needs of the entrepreneur. Regions where entrepreneurial skills are strong and well-developed are therefore better prepared to face economic crises and the challenges of a globalized market. That said, there are significant challenges to overcome for entrepreneurial skills to be fully exploited. One of the main obstacles to the acquisition of these skills is the lack of appropriate education and training. Although formal education in entrepreneurship has progressed, it is not enough on its own to prepare entrepreneurs to face market realities. The acquisition of entrepreneurial skills also requires practical experiences, access to networks of entrepreneurs and the ability to make decisions in contexts of uncertainty. Environments conducive to entrepreneurship, such as business incubators and coworking spaces, also play a crucial role in this process of continuous training. Moreover, according to Olanrewaju et al. (2020), access to these external resources is a key factor in the development of entrepreneurial skills. Collaboration and mutual learning between entrepreneurs can accelerate the process of creating a viable and sustainable business. In this dynamic, research has also highlighted the importance of skills related to risk management and resilience. According to Hedner et al. (2011), entrepreneurial resilience is one of the most crucial skills to overcome obstacles related to uncertainty and failure. A resilient entrepreneur is able to bounce back from failures, learn from mistakes, and adapt to new market realities (Abdennadher, 2021a). Resilience is particularly important in rapidly changing sectors, where risks are high and margins for error are low.

Finally, entrepreneurial skills are not limited to managing a business. They also have a significant impact on the entrepreneur's ability to positively influence their environment and contribute to the sustainable development of their territory. Entrepreneurs, by mobilizing their skills to meet local needs, play a key role in social and economic inclusion, particularly in underdeveloped regions or those in economic transition. According to Hasan et al. (2024), these dynamics are particularly visible in small and medium-sized enterprises, which, thanks to their specific skills, can transform marginalized regions into poles of economic development.

b) The Resource-based Approach

The resource-based view (RBV), although initially developed to analyze the competitive advantages of companies, has found interesting applications in the context of territories. Introduced by Wernerfelt (1984) and developed by Barney (2007), this approach postulates that performance depends mainly on internal resources that are rare, non-substitutable, and difficult to imitate. In a global environment marked by growing inequalities between territories, this perspective is particularly useful for understanding how certain geographical areas manage to stand out.

According to Barney (2007), a strategic resource is defined by its value, rarity, inimitable, and non-substitutable (VRIN). Applied to territories, this concept encompasses a variety of elements, ranging from natural resources to infrastructure, including human, cultural, and institutional assets. For example, the architectural heritage of cities such as Florence or Kyoto constitutes a unique and valuable resource that is difficult to replicate elsewhere.

However, not all resources automatically translate into competitive advantages. Inefficient management can reduce their potential. The case of hydrocarbon-dependent economies, such as some regions of the Middle East, illustrates the "paradox of abundance": despite their natural wealth, inadequate strategic choices often limit their economic diversification (Auty, 2002).

The work of Rodríguez-Pose (2018) shows that to transform resources into competitive assets, it is essential to invest in suitable infrastructure, inclusive policies and effective governance. For example, European regions with EU structural funds have been more successful in mobilising their latent resources for local development than comparable regions without strong institutional support.

Collective skills, defined as the capacity of a group of actors to mobilise, coordinate and transform resources effectively, are essential for territorial success. These skills are based on dynamic interactions between companies, universities, public authorities and citizens. They encompass various dimensions, including collaborative innovation, strategic planning and conflict resolution.

For example, industrial clusters in Northern Europe have demonstrated their ability to reinvent themselves by combining collective learning and smart specialisation. The Norwegian maritime industry is an

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emblematic case: thanks to close cooperation between companies, academic institutions and local governments, this sector has not only withstood market fluctuations, but has also positioned itself as a global leader in green maritime technologies (Isaksen and Trippl, 2016).

Beyond the economic sphere, collective skills also play a key role in managing social and environmental challenges. Through participatory governance processes, territories can mobilise their inhabitants to co-create innovative solutions. Healey's (2006) work on participatory urban planning shows that inclusive approaches can build a shared strategic vision, thus strengthening social cohesion and local resilience.

In a context marked by environmental and social crises, the RBV approach can be broadened to include a sustainability perspective. Territories can exploit their renewable resources while minimizing negative externalities. Cities such as Stockholm or Vancouver illustrate this strategy by adopting ambitious carbon emission reduction policies, while valuing their natural and technological assets (Bulkeley et al., 2014).

However, achieving this balance requires effective governance and strong institutional skills. Ostrom's (2010) research on the collective management of common resources shows that well-designed institutional frameworks can promote sustainable use while ensuring a fair distribution of benefits.

In this context, innovation plays a crucial role. For example, territories can adopt circular economic models to maximize the use of local resources. The region of Flanders, Belgium, is a pioneering example in this field, with initiatives integrating recycling, renewable energy and eco-design (Levoso et al., 2020).

Although promising, applying the RBV approach to territories is not without challenges. First, identifying strategic resources requires a detailed understanding of local dynamics. This can be hampered by a lack of data or limited coordination between key actors. Camagni and Capello (2013) highlight that in many cases, intangible resources, such as social or cultural capital, are underestimated due to a lack of suitable methodologies.

Second, conflicts of interest between local actors can limit resource mobilization. For example, in regions dominated by extractive industries, tensions between local communities, businesses, and public authorities can hamper economic diversification initiatives.

Finally, territorial sustainability requires trade-offs between resource exploitation and preservation. Territories facing major environmental challenges must invest in innovative technologies and policies to ensure balanced development. Research on vulnerable coastal areas, such as those in the Lesser Antilles, shows that insufficient investments in climate resilience exacerbate risks for local populations (Nurse et al., 2014).

Despite these challenges, the RBV approach offers strategic opportunities for policymakers. First, it encourages differentiation based on local specificities. For example, regions with a rich cultural heritage can position themselves as unique tourist destinations. Scotland has successfully used this strategy by promoting its traditions while investing in modern infrastructure (Smith and Richards, 2013).

Second, the rise of digital technologies facilitates the identification and valorization of territorial resources. Geographic information systems and big data tools enable more precise planning and evidence-based decisions (Batty, 2018).

Finally, the RBV approach promotes long-term thinking, encouraging territories to invest in sustainable skills and collaborative networks. The Nordic regional development strategy, focusing on education, innovation and sustainability, is an inspiring example for other regions (Lundvall, 2016).

The resource- and skills-based approach represents a powerful perspective for understanding and strengthening the competitiveness of territories. By focusing on specific resources and collective skills, this approach helps to reveal the latent potential of territories while promoting sustainable and inclusive management. However, its application requires concerted efforts, effective governance and a long-term strategic vision. By mobilizing these principles, territories can not only address contemporary challenges, but also build a more equitable and resilient future.

c) Performance

The notion of performance occupies a central place in management sciences, but it remains complex due to its multidimensional nature (Bocco, 2010). Since the 1980s, numerous studies (Bouquin, 1986; Bescos et al., 1993; Bourguignon, 1995; Lebas, 1995; Bessire, 1999) have attempted to better define and measure it, giving rise to a variety of approaches and perspectives (Issor, 2017).

Bourguignon (1995) emphasizes that performance is a polysemic concept Ghaz & Oubrahimi, 2024). According to him, it can be understood in two ways: the achievement of organizational objectives, regardless of the nature and variety of these objectives. This achievement can be understood in the strict sense (result, outcome) or in the broad sense of the process that leads to the result (action) (Ghaz & Oubrahimi, 2024).

This definition highlights both the measurable purpose and the strategic process that leads to the results. This perspective is now expanding to integrate social and environmental dimensions, in line with stakeholder expectations and sustainability issues (Gningue et al., 2023).

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Performance can be assessed through several fundamental dimensions. According to Issor (2017), four principles structure this assessment:

- Effectiveness, measured by the ability to achieve the set objectives. It relates the results obtained to the previously defined objectives, constituting a key indicator in a competitive environment.
- Efficiency, which focuses on the optimization of the means mobilized to obtain the results. It expresses performance in relation to the use of resources.
- Coherence, reflecting the alignment of the internal elements of the organization to ensure optimal synergy. A coherent organization is better equipped to face internal and external transformations.
- Relevance, which links objectives and means to environmental constraints. This dimension is essential for assessing strategic performance, particularly in complex environments.

Paturel and Maalel (2016) propose a complementary framework for measuring performance based on three key dimensions.

- Effectiveness represents the achievement of organizational objectives as they were set. It focuses on the results obtained in relation to expectations.
- Efficiency, for its part, highlights the relationship between the resources mobilized and the results obtained, which reinforces the importance of minimizing costs or waste while maximizing production.
- Effectiveness assesses the extent to which the actions undertaken produce the expected effects. This dimension goes beyond the simple relationship between means and results, by focusing on the impact and relevance of the actions implemented.

This triptych enriches the understanding of organizations by allowing their performance to be evaluated on both quantitative and qualitative bases, while taking into account their specific contexts.

For their part, Morin (1994) identifies four major theoretical approaches explaining organizational performance (Erragragui & Aoufir, 2023).

- The economic approach, focused on financial results and indicators such as profitability or revenue growth.
- The social approach, which emphasizes employee well-being, stakeholder satisfaction and societal impact.
- The systemic approach, which considers the organization as a complex system where performance results from harmonious interactions between the different components.
- The political approach, which explores power dynamics, negotiations and influence strategies within the organization.

In addition, a fifth approach is emerging in recent academic debates, integrating social and environmental dimensions, in accordance with the triple bottom line concept (Cherkaoui & El Aabar, 2022).

Bocco (2010) further broadens the understanding of performance with a multidimensional vision that encompasses three main dimensions.

- The strategic dimension, relating to the ability to achieve long-term objectives and create sustainable value.
- The socio-economic dimension, integrating the impacts of organizational activities on employees, customers and society.
- The competitive dimension, which assesses the organization's ability to maintain a sustainable competitive advantage.
- Hall (1980), for his part, distinguishes two fundamental models of performance:
- The goal-based model (goal achievement model), which emphasizes the achievement of set objectives.
- The resource acquisition model, which assesses an organization's ability to acquire and mobilize its resources effectively.

These traditional models remain relevant but have been enriched by recent frameworks integrating digitalization, innovation and sustainability as strategic levers (Teece, 2018).

Indeed, organizational performance is a complex and evolving concept. Classical approaches, enriched by contemporary contributions such as those of Paturel and Maalel (2016), show that performance evaluation is no longer limited to financial measures alone. It encompasses strategic, social, environmental and political dimensions that reflect stakeholder expectations and the challenges of dynamic environments.

III. Research Methodology

The study presented in this article seeks to explore the role of entrepreneurial skills and the mobilization of local resources in the territorial performance of Sfax. Indeed, in this contribution, we attempt to answer the question: how can entrepreneurial skills and the mobilization of local resources improve the territorial performance of Sfax?

To address this issue, we have opted for an exploratory approach within the framework of qualitative research. According to Bryman (2016), qualitative research can answer complex questions, particularly when it comes to explaining the "how" of phenomena. This type of methodology is particularly suited to studies on entrepreneurship, as it offers the flexibility needed to understand specific and contextual dynamics (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

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The methodology chosen is based on a case study through interviews. This method is particularly relevant when answering questions exploring complex processes or mechanisms (Yin, 2009). In our research, each "case" corresponds to an entrepreneur carrying out a project, and our unit of analysis is therefore the individual. Given the exploratory orientation of this study, we adopted a multi-site approach, integrating several cases in order to diversify perspectives and ensure better contextual representativeness. Our sample consists of 20 entrepreneurs from the Sfax region. This number, although apparently small, is in line with the logic of qualitative studies where sampling is guided more by the relevance of the cases than by statistical representativeness (Patton, 2014). As for the selection of participants, this is a purposive sampling. Huberman (2014) emphasizes that this type of sampling is based on a deliberate choice of cases for their ability to enrich theoretical reflection, rather than on a random selection aimed at statistical generalization.

The data were collected using semi-directed centered interviews. This technique, as explained by Qu & Dumay (2011), allows respondents to be guided in the discussion while minimizing the researcher's biases. Semi-directed interviews thus offer an opportunity to obtain rich, detailed data that is directly relevant to the research objectives. In this context, the interview guide was designed to explore the participants' entrepreneurial skills, the resources mobilized in their activities, and the perceived impacts on territorial development.

The approach adopted guarantees in-depth and contextualized data collection, which is essential for identifying elements likely to contribute to a better understanding of the mechanisms linking entrepreneurship and territorial performance. The average duration of each interview is 50 minutes. The interview guide was structured around the following questions.

- What do you think are the key skills that an entrepreneur must have to succeed in the Sfax region?
- How do these skills contribute to your daily activity?
- What challenges have you encountered in developing your entrepreneurial skills, and how did you overcome them?
- Are there local mechanisms or networks that have helped you develop these skills?
- What local resources (material, human, financial, or institutional) have you mobilized to launch or develop your business?
- What are the main advantages or limitations of these resources in the Sfax region?
- How do you assess the role of local networks or partnerships (with other entrepreneurs, public or private institutions) in the success of your project?
- How do your entrepreneurial initiatives contribute to the economic and social development of the Sfax region?
- What changes or improvements would you like to see in the local environment to better support entrepreneurs and strengthen territorial performance?

The data collected were analyzed using a content analysis method. They were first recorded, then transcribed in full to ensure fidelity to the participants' statements. These transcriptions were then organized in verbatim form. Subsequently, these verbatim were subjected to a thematic coding process, structured around the dimensions of our research question, as recommended by Cooper et al. (2012) in their approach to qualitative thematic analysis.

IV. Results and Analysis

a) *The Performance of LPS*

Through the interviews conducted, 15 of the entrepreneurs interviewed acknowledge their membership in LPSin Sfax, and even beyond, in other regions. This membership, according to them, represents a major asset in overcoming the difficulties they face. Several of them say that they could not carry out certain projects without the support of their local network. As one of the entrepreneurs points out: "It is thanks to our local network that we can accelerate the implementation of projects. Solidarity and exchange between actors are essential to succeed in our sector." This idea is consistent with the observation of Delaplace (2011), according to which LPSplay a central role in strengthening the competitiveness of local companies by promoting the exchange of resources and intercompany collaboration. Indeed, these entrepreneurs confirm that their membership in these systems allows them to be more efficient and responsive in project management, while reducing the risk of failure when working alone.

For these entrepreneurs, integration into a LPSseems to facilitate the circulation of ideas, knowledge and know-how. Networking also makes it possible to identify common objectives and face shared challenges, a phenomenon that Malecki (2011) describes as "social capital" that promotes better coordination within LPS. These entrepreneurs explain that the relationships of trust built over time strengthen the sustainability of the partnership. In this regard, one entrepreneur states: "It is trust that allows us to continue working together, even in difficult times. It is not just a question of money, but of credibility and shared values." This idea is supported by the literature, where several studies, including that of Kandade et al. (2021), recall the importance of interpersonal relationships and trust in maintaining strong business partnerships, particularly in LPS.

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The interview results reveal that the performance of an LPSis measured according to two essential dimensions: the flexible specialization and the adaptability-innovation capacity of the LPS, as well as the governance of these systems. These two dimensions are essential to understand the effectiveness of LPSin the context of Sfax, a region marked by the diversity of sectors and industrial activities.

Flexible specialization is a key element in the organization of these systems. It allows entrepreneurs to be responsive to market fluctuations and to adopt innovative practices. Indeed, most companies in Sfax, as one of the entrepreneurs explains, have had to "constantly adapt to new customer demands", which has allowed them to remain competitive. However, the interview results reveal heterogeneity in the sectors of activity of the companies, with varied industrial and service profiles. Three companies do not practice production, limiting themselves only to the trade of goods. Two other companies are in the mass distribution sector, with a marginal share of production, while 4 companies specialize in services and 11 others have an industrial profile.

The diversity of the modes of organization of production activities in these companies is striking. Indeed, the majority of companies use organized production lines (7 companies) or a dual mode of organization, both by workshop and by production line (4 companies). However, equipment flexibility seems less common, as shown in the study by Courlet and Ferguene (2010). According to them, equipment flexibility and flexible specialization within LPS are fundamental characteristics of their performance. On the other hand, our study reveals that the majority of companies in Sfax do not have this flexibility, because they rely on specialized rather than versatile equipment. The productive organization of companies within LPSis mainly based on the equipment and skills available. The entrepreneurs interviewed mostly have industrial profiles, but there are notable differences in the use of equipment. While some companies favor specialized equipment by workshop or production line, others opt for versatile equipment, allowing greater flexibility. However, this flexibility is not systematic, and in the context of LPS in Sfax, it seems to have a limited impact on the overall performance of the local production system.

In this regard, an entrepreneur testifies: "The flexibility of equipment is an asset, but what matters most is the ability of our teams to adapt and solve problems quickly. Without human skills, technology can do nothing." This is consistent with the work of Reagans and Zuckerman (2013), who emphasize that the flexibility of equipment is important, but that adaptability and human skills are the key factors for the success of companies in an LPS.

Our results show that while material flexibility plays an important role, it is far from sufficient to guarantee the performance of LPS. The human aspect, in particular the entrepreneurial skills and adaptability of local actors, appears to be a crucial lever for improving the territorial performance of Sfax.

Indeed, the analysis of the interviews reveals that entrepreneurial skills and the mobilization of local resources, within the LPSof Sfax, play a central role in territorial performance. The ability of entrepreneurs to overcome challenges through solidarity, the exchange of ideas and know-how, as well as the consolidation of inter-company relations, constitutes a real driver of competitiveness for the region. However, the organization of companies and the flexibility of equipment are not enough on their own to ensure performance: the governance of the LPS, trust between actors and human skills remain determining factors for the success of collective projects.

b) Human Resources Management and Territorial Performance

In the 20 cases studied, the majority of entrepreneurs report having a human resources department, with the exception of two. The vast majority of these entrepreneurs offer their employees permanent contracts, an approach that contributes to team stability and better human resources management. This stability is seen as a major asset by the entrepreneurs interviewed. As one of them stated: "Having permanent employees allows us to build solid relationships and ensure better skills management in the long term." This approach not only promotes employee loyalty, but also continuity in projects, a key factor for the sustainable development of entrepreneurs and regional competitiveness.

Concerning human resources management tools, ten entrepreneurs have set up a skills framework, eight have a job and skills management system, and fifteen practice management by objectives as well as a training plan. However, two entrepreneurs do not use any specific skills management tools, and another does not communicate about its management tools. Nevertheless, for the 20 cases that are part of the LPS, 18 of them use skills management tools, placing these skills at the heart of their development strategy. This result supports the idea put forward by Fortuné (2024), who highlights the importance of skills management tools to promote innovation and the competitiveness of projects. As for the skills profile, 18 entrepreneurs have developed detailed profiles of the skills available within their teams. These entrepreneurs have a varied range of professional skills, often with versatile qualifications, with the exception of 5 who favor specialized skills. In addition, 15 entrepreneurs highlight a high capacity for learning and innovation. This versatility of qualifications is an asset for the adaptability of entrepreneurs in the

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face of market changes and the requirements of the local production system. As one entrepreneur explains: "Our employees are able to adapt to different roles, which allows us to face unforeseen challenges effectively." The adaptability of the cases studied is also reflected in flexibility in the way they regulate specialization. This system is characterized by competition based more on product quality than on price. 18 of the entrepreneurs interviewed consider that the quality and diversity of their offerings represent a key competitive advantage, clearly distinguishing them from the competition (Abdennadher, 2021b). One entrepreneur testifies: "In our sector, price competition is a thing of the past. Today, what makes the difference is the ability to offer products that comply with international standards and to anticipate market needs." This phenomenon of flexible specialization is consistent with the work of Lazzarini et al. (2001), who suggest that competition by quality, rather than by price, is an effective differentiation strategy in LPS, allowing entrepreneurs to remain competitive in the face of global competition.

With the exception of two entrepreneurs, the others emphasize the importance of competition based on product quality and diversity of supply. For these entrepreneurs, the opening of the market on an international scale makes competition increasingly demanding, requiring an upgrade of quality standards to surpass foreign competitors. In this sense, the implementation of adapted skills management and a quality differentiation strategy seems to be an essential lever to ensure the sustainability of local entrepreneurs and, by extension, improve the territorial performance of Sfax.

c) Territorial Development and Skills Development

In the 20 cases studied, 18 entrepreneurs draw up detailed profiles of the skills available within their structures. These companies display a diversity of professional skills, characterized by versatile qualifications. However, three of them favor more specialized skills. Furthermore, 17 entrepreneurs state that their teams have a strong capacity for learning, and 14 emphasize a high aptitude for innovation. This collective dynamic has allowed 18 companies to develop collective skills, 17 to acquire organizational and dynamic capacities, and 16 to consolidate key skills.

This widespread awareness of the importance of skills is reflected in targeted management and improvement policies. One entrepreneur summarizes: "Skills are not just an asset; they are the backbone of the sustainability of our business." This corroborates the work of Ali and Anwar (2021), who highlight that skills are a strategic resource for the competitiveness of companies.

To maintain and develop their human resources, 15 interviewed entrepreneurs have implemented policies to improve knowledge and learning capabilities. Among them, 5 use training abroad, while 4 invite foreign trainers to improve local skills. In addition, 12 companies have a system for creating new knowledge, 16 engage in skills development, 15 invest in skills building, and 15 implement specific processes to develop key skills.

An entrepreneur testifies: "We have realized that to remain competitive, it is essential to always learn and innovate. That is why we invest in targeted training, although it is expensive." However, a major challenge remains the migration of trained talent: after benefiting from company-funded training, some employees leave to explore better opportunities. This phenomenon imposes on companies a recurring recruitment and training cycle, with significant costs.

The analysis reveals that 18 entrepreneurs consider that the territory of Sfax provides them with specific resources, while 17 recognize the contribution of the territory in the creation of unique skills, including know-how and raw materials. In addition, 18 entrepreneurs emphasize that these skills are based on intrinsic qualities of the territory, such as its historical heritage and its various resources.

However, collaboration with training organizations remains a weak point. Although 13 entrepreneurs maintain partnerships with vocational training centers, they often criticize the standardized nature of the training offered. One entrepreneur explains: "These trainings lack relevance. They do not respond to the real challenges that we face daily." Universities are not exempt from criticism, as they also struggle to provide training adapted to the needs of local companies, a finding that is consistent with the observations of Castillo-Vergara et al. (2021), who highlight the essential role of adapting training in the competitiveness of local businesses.

The Sfax region shows signs of resilience and innovation, although challenges persist. 18 entrepreneurs interviewed noted a growing dynamism, supported by local initiatives and limited public efforts. This dynamism is based on the valorization of local skills and the ability to create specific non-transferable resources.

The Sfax region is thus beginning a virtuous cycle where the development of the territory and that of LPSfeed off each other. One entrepreneur emphasizes: "The local production system in which we operate is not limited to a survival strategy; it actively contributes to revitalizing the entire territory." This observation is in line with the theories of Dissart & Seigneuret (2020), who consider that territorial development based on local skills and resources promotes resilience and regional competitiveness.

However, the territory of Sfax shows encouraging signs in terms of partnerships for innovation, despite some limitations. Although the

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majority of companies continue to rely mainly on internal initiatives, there is a gradual increase in external collaborations, particularly in the field of vocational training. This development shows that the territory is beginning to evolve towards a model of "innovative environment", as described by the model proposed by Asheim and Gertler (2006). Although there is still some way to go to fully achieve this status, the efforts undertaken demonstrate a growing potential to strengthen innovation through strategic partnerships.

Finally, the territory of Sfax has undeniable potential to become a model of skills-based development. Nevertheless, significant efforts are needed to strengthen collaborations between companies, training organizations, and public institutions. The objective would be to establish a synergy where LPScontribute to territorial performance, while benefiting from the region's unique resources and skills.

V. Conclusion

This work explored the role of entrepreneurial skills and the mobilization of local resources in the territorial performance of Sfax, highlighting the dynamics specific to LPS. The analysis reveals that the latter constitute essential levers for the competitiveness and resilience of the territory, thanks to their capacity to integrate human, organizational and territorial factors.

The results of the interviews conducted with 20 entrepreneurs highlight several major findings. First, the flexible specialization, characteristic of LPS, promotes crucial adaptability to market fluctuations, although it is sometimes limited by low flexibility of equipment. This constraint is nevertheless offset by the effective mobilization of human skills, which stand out as a central pillar of performance. Second, the networks of solidarity and trust, inscribed in a logic of social capital, strengthen inter-company partnerships and contribute to territorial cohesion.

In addition, human resources management emerges as a strategic determinant in the performance of LPS. The implementation of structured policies, such as training plans and management by objectives, helps stabilize teams and stimulate their versatility, which is essential for innovation and organizational learning. However, challenges persist, particularly with regard to talent drain and the inadequacy of professional training with the specific needs of the local market.

The territory of Sfax is also distinguished by its unique resources and significant potential to become an innovation hub. However, achieving this objective requires better synergy between businesses, training institutions and public actors. The creation of a true "innovative environment" appears to be a promising way to maximize the value of local resources and strengthen regional competitiveness.

In conclusion, this study highlights that the territorial performance of Sfax is based on an integrated approach combining skills management, organizational innovation and territorial collaboration. To meet the challenges identified and seize emerging opportunities, it is crucial to strengthen organizational flexibility, align training with market needs, and promote participatory governance of LPS. Such an approach will not only consolidate Sfax's resilience, but also place its development in a sustainable and inclusive growth trajectory, making this region a model for other territories with a high entrepreneurial density.

The results of this work open the way to several avenues of future research. A more in-depth exploration of the specific mechanisms by which social capital influences territorial performance could provide additional insights. Similarly, a comparative analysis with other regions, national or international, would make it possible to identify transferable success factors and those that relate to local specificities. Finally, a longitudinal approach integrating quantitative data on the economic performance of LPS would offer a more complete understanding of their evolution and their impact on territorial development.

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