

The Role of Cultural and Creative Industries as Drivers of Innovation in Strengthening Morocco's Cultural Diplomacy and Soft Power

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Abstract: In a globalized world marked by a race between countries for greater influence, innovation capacity, and economic productivity, Cultural and Creative Industries (CCIs) are now establishing themselves as powerful strategic levers for the socio-economic development of nations, and key drivers of innovation and influence in the service of cultural diplomacy and their soft power. The objective of this article is to examine how innovation in its various and multiple dimensions within Moroccan CCIs can play a fundamental role in strengthening Moroccan cultural diplomacy and soft power. The research addresses the following central question: to what extent do multidimensional innovation dynamics within the Moroccan Cultural and Creative Industries ecosystems contribute to strengthening Moroccan cultural diplomacy and Morocco's soft power on a global scale? Adopting an exploratory approach, this qualitative research relied on a triangular methodological approach combining a literature review focused on institutional and governmental reports and studies, case studies, an international benchmark of best practices in the field and semi-structured interviews conducted with institutional actors, professionals and experts in cultural diplomacy and CCIs. This research highlighted Morocco's growing interest in its innovative CCIs ecosystem and the diversity of partnerships established within this framework for the country's cultural influence. It identified the strategic role that innovative CCIs can play in strengthening Moroccan cultural diplomacy, while addressing the multiple challenges in this regard and identifying the structural, organizational, and other barriers that hinder the full deployment of this ecosystem of cultural and creative innovation and entrepreneurship. The results of our research also allowed us to schematize in an integrative conceptual model the interactions between innovation, CCIs, cultural diplomacy and Morocco's soft power, by clarifying the main development levers to be implemented to increase the innovation potential of CCIs as driving forces in order to consolidate Morocco's soft power through cultural diplomacy focused on innovation.

Keywords: Cultural and Creative Industries, Innovation, Cultural Diplomacy, Soft Power, Entrepreneurial Ecosystems.

1. Introduction

In a hyperconnected and ultra-competitive global context, cultural diplomacy has become a powerful vector of influence for countries and an essential tool for positioning themselves on the global stage and strengthening their soft power and international cultural relations. Cummings defines cultural diplomacy as "the exchange of ideas, information, art, and other aspects of culture between nations and their peoples in order to promote mutual understanding" (Cummings, 2003, p.1).

Like other countries around the world, Morocco has also placed paramount importance on its cultural diplomacy and the role that CCIs can fully play in this context. In this context, the Special Commission on the Development Model (CSMD) advocates in its General Report "encouraging the development of innovative cultural initiatives through the professionalization of the cultural sector and improved access to public funding as well as quality support" (SCDM, 2021, p.25). It also called for "promoting and energizing innovative cultural and media production that contribute to the debate, raise awareness, and drive Morocco's international outreach; and finally" (SCDM, 2021, p.25). It should be noted in this context that these recommendations align with global trends and emerging best practices in the governance, structuring, investment, promotion, and development of innovative CCIs in order to increase their influence and strengthen their cultural soft power on the international stage.

Although CCIs in Morocco constitute strategic and priority sectors and also possess strong creative potential and significant socio-economic impact, their role as powerful drivers of innovation still presents challenges that should be addressed in order to increase Morocco's international visibility on the global cultural diplomacy stage.

The objective of this article is to explore how CCIs, as drivers of innovation, can actively contribute to strengthening Moroccan cultural diplomacy by identifying innovative development opportunities within the framework of a holistic, strategic, and integrated vision for strengthening Morocco's soft power. This article also aims to examine the various challenges and obstacles limiting the innovative potential of Moroccan CCIs. The objective is to propose strategic recommendations within the framework of a synthetic and global conceptual model to overcome these obstacles and enable the CCIs to fully play their central and innovative role in strengthening Moroccan diplomacy and cultural influence. The central question of this research is therefore: to

what extent can an innovative and efficient CCIs sector play a fundamental role in strengthening Moroccan cultural soft power and modernizing Moroccan cultural diplomacy on a global scale?

Thus, after defining the CCIs in relation to cultural diplomacy, we addressed the context of the CCIs in Morocco and their role in strengthening cultural diplomacy. We then identified the challenges and constraints limiting their structuring impact at this level, before concluding with major recommendations aimed at increasing the innovative potential of the CCIs as strategic levers for strengthening Moroccan cultural diplomacy and soft power.

2. Theoretical Framework and Research Methodology

2.1 Theoretical Framework

Focusing our reflection on the role of cultural and creative industries as drivers of innovation in strengthening Morocco's cultural diplomacy and soft power, we adopted a holistic and combinatorial approach to analyze the interactions and dynamics between different cultural and creative actors. To this end, we mobilized the triple helix model of Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff (2000) which emphasizes active relationships and dynamic interactions between academia, industry and government to promote entrepreneurship, innovation and economic growth in a knowledge-based economy, in addition to the quadruple helix model of Carayannis and Campbell (2009) which integrates civil society as the additional fourth helix. We also used Howkins' (2013) creative economy theoretical framework and Throsby's (2008) concentric circles model of cultural industries to examine the role of Moroccan CCIs as catalysts for growth and vectors of soft power and identify the levers of export and diplomatic influence of Moroccan cultural and creative sectors. We also adopted Joseph Nye's soft power theory focusing on attraction and persuasion through intangible power resources such as culture, ideology and institutions (Nye, 2021, 1990) and providing a framework for understanding how cultural innovations become tools of influence and soft power on the international scene.

2.2 Research Methodology

This qualitative research, carried out in the little-explored field of Moroccan cultural diplomacy in interaction with innovation and CCIs, has been completed according to a triangular methodological approach combining a literature review focused on institutional and governmental reports and studies, case studies, an international benchmark of best practices in the field and semi-structured interviews conducted with thirty five institutional actors, professionals and experts in cultural diplomacy and CCIs. By opting for an exploratory and qualitative approach, we treated innovation in CCIs as a complex and multidimensional phenomenon requiring a holistic vision according to a systemic approach to understand the different facets of the role of innovative CCIs in strengthening Moroccan cultural diplomacy by favoring the in-depth understanding of the dynamics, perceptions, perspectives carried by the main actors intervening in the ecosystems of Moroccan CCIs. This methodological triangulation allowed for the mitigation of certain constraints and potential limits inherent in our qualitative and exploratory approach such as time constraints, partial access to certain data and thus strengthen the robustness of the results obtained which are specific to the studied Moroccan context.

3. Cultural and Creative Industries (CCIs): Innovative and Powerful Drivers of Growth and Soft Power at the Service of Cultural Diplomacy

Cultural diplomacy has become a fundamental lever of influence, establishing itself as a growing field of study within the framework of international relations and soft power. Within this framework, Cultural and Creative Industries (CCIs) play a central role as powerful tools for projecting a country's image and promoting its cultural values internationally. As O'Connor (2010) has argued, scholarly discussions of culture industries generally date back to the 1940s when Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer first coined the term in 1947. Indeed, as Fernández (2021) points out, "Culture is linked to cultural diplomacy and soft power because of the need for coexistence of the different communities, territories and nations in our global village" (p.32).

This demonstrates the fundamental role that CCIs can play in promoting and disseminating national culture, dialogue, and cultural exchange. They thus foster an environment conducive to cultural cooperation, influence, and dissemination. This is why CCIs have a very close relationship with cultural diplomacy and influence.

CCIs are a strategic driver of employment, economic growth, and innovation, and have positive economic effects. As confirmed by OECD (2022), "They spur innovation and are a source of creative skills with strong backward

and forward linkages in the economy” (p.3). As defined by UNESCO (2015), CCIs are activities “whose principal purpose is production or reproduction, promotion, distribution or commercialization of goods, services and activities of a cultural, artistic or heritage-related nature.” (p.11). For UNESCO (2022), “The cultural and creative sectors account for 3.1% and of global GDP 6.2% of all employment” (p.3).

As shown in the following figure, UNESCO has produced a conceptual framework that groups together the areas covered by CCIs. These include cultural and natural heritage, performance and celebration, visual arts and crafts, books and press, audiovisual and interactive media, design and creative services. It has also included tourism, sport and recreation as related domains.

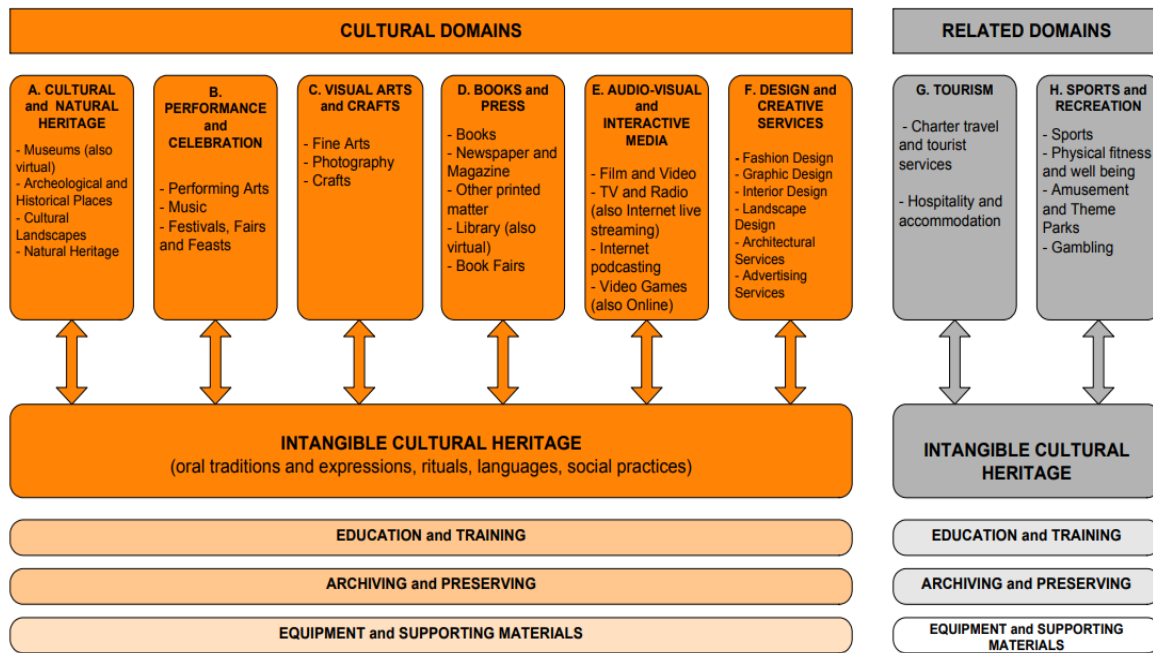


Figure 1: The UNESCO Framework for Cultural Statistics (UNESCO-ISU, 2009, p.24)

According to GIZ (2024), although definitions vary depending on the context, country, and the heterogeneous landscape of CCIs, they share common characteristics. These include their diverse nature, marketability, symbolic and functional value, tangible and intangible inputs, and the creative act (GIZ, 2024).

Furthermore, several scientific studies have highlighted the crucial importance of digital technologies and their structuring impact on CCIs (Ortiz-Ospino, L., González-Sarmiento, E., & Roa-Perez, J., 2025). Other international organizations such as UNCTAD have emphasized the modernizing and professionalizing characteristics induced by the considerable growth of what it calls Creative Industry 4.0 (UNCTAD, 2021).

Furthermore, innovation in the field of CCIs has received particular attention from scientific researchers (Gohoungodji, 2025), highlighting their distinctive features and typologies covering aesthetic, symbolic, economic, and relational aspects (Gohoungodji and Amara, 2023).

As part of their national strategies of soft power and cultural influence, several countries around the world have invested in this field of cultural and creative industries, giving them great importance as key sectors and catalysts of their influence and cultural diplomacy, such as the United States, France, the United Kingdom, South Korea and Japan.

4. The CCIs Sector in Morocco: Growing Interest and Partnerships Serving Morocco's Cultural Diplomacy

Morocco places great importance on culture and its cultural and creative industries (CCIs) as strategic levers for inclusion, cohesion, economic prosperity, innovation, influence, and geopolitical soft power. The ambition of its New Development Model is to create the conditions for Morocco to capitalize on all its assets, including its rich and diverse cultural potential, by becoming a nation of opportunity, entrepreneurship, and innovation (SCDM, 2021). By contributing around 1% to Morocco's GDP with an ambition to reach 2 to 3% of the national GDP by

2030, and the creation of more than 100,000 jobs, the CCI are positioned as strategic sectors with strong growth potential.

Indeed, The Moroccan New Development Model emphasizes the fostering of the growth of innovative cultural initiatives through the professionalization of cultural sectors, better access to public funding, public procurement, and international funds, and enhanced support (SCDM, 2021). It also calls for promoting and boosting innovative and high-quality cultural and media production contributing to debate, awareness-raising and the international influence of Morocco, through the establishment, among other things, of a digital platform for cultural industries focused in particular on the production of innovative and high-quality audiovisual content with an Afro-Mediterranean focus, in collaboration with national cinematographic and television structures (SCDM, 2021).

The Moroccan CCI are characterized by a creative effervescence and a growing dynamic aimed at promoting Moroccan cultural diplomacy and creativity. This growing interest was marked by the creation in 2017 of the Moroccan Federation of Cultural and Creative Industries (FCCI), which identified, as shown in the figure below, eight key CCI in Morocco:

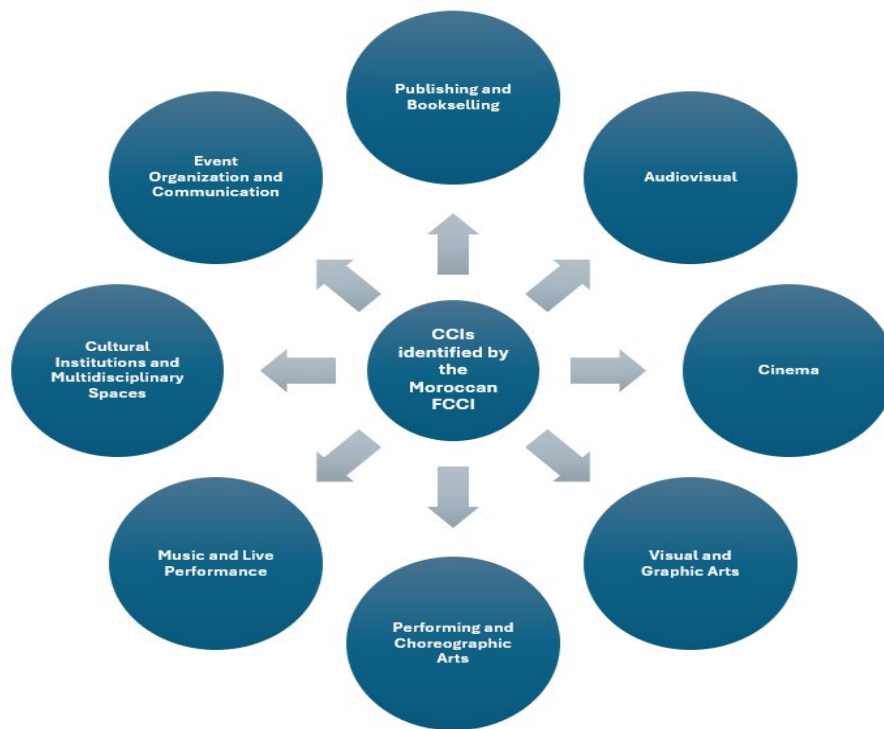


Figure 2: The Eight Key CCI identified by the FCCI in Morocco

In addition, Morocco has initiated several cultural initiatives and events focused on its CCI, using a collaborative approach that integrates public operators, the private sector, civil society, and international organizations involved in Morocco's various cultural and creative entrepreneurial ecosystems stimulating innovative entrepreneurship in these sectors. Morocco thus organizes several forums, exhibitions, festivals, conferences, and international meetings annually in conjunction with these CCI. In this context, the organization of the first edition of the CCI Summit in 2019 and the second edition in 2024 demonstrates the strategic importance of these sectors, as affirmed by the organizers of these two events, namely the Ministry of Youth, Culture, and Communication, in collaboration with the Federation of Cultural and Creative Industries of the General Confederation of Moroccan Enterprises, and with the support of the European Union in Morocco, marked by the signing of several cultural cooperation agreements also focusing on the development of Moroccan CCI.

All this testifies to the strategic importance and this dynamic partnership and repositioning of this Moroccan creative and cultural entrepreneurial ecosystem. It should also be noted that innovation was a major focus of the 2024 Conference, considered a pillar of the transformation of the CCIS, in addition to other themes also addressed, such as public-private partnerships, innovative financing, cultural tourism and heritage promotion, the impact of artificial intelligence and digital technology on human capital, and the global development prospects of the CCIS.

Thus, our research highlighted the fundamental role of Moroccan CCIs on the global cultural diplomacy scene in terms of promoting and projecting Morocco's cultural image, creating exportable cultural content, in addition to the cultural and tourist appeal they can generate through the various cultural events such as festivals and the various cultural participations abroad involving several Moroccan CCIs celebrating innovation and collaboration, such as the participation of Morocco as the Guest of Honor at the Paris Book Festival 2025, and the "Year of Culture Qatar-Morocco 2024", organized within the framework of the "Years of Culture Qatar" initiative.

5. Challenges and Constraints Limiting the Innovation Potential of CCIs and Their Contribution to Morocco's Cultural Diplomacy

What are the challenges facing the entrepreneurial ecosystems of the Cultural and Creative Industries, hampering their full innovation potential in the service of cultural diplomacy and Morocco's soft power? This is also the question we addressed in our research to identify the major challenges inhibiting innovation and reducing the ability of CCIs to move up a gear and achieve the expected impact and benefits of this strategic and highly promising sector.



Figure 3: The Main Challenges facing Moroccan CCIs

As shown in the figure above, among the major challenges unanimously highlighted by our interviewed population, insufficient and inadequate funding remains the weak point limiting the creative and innovative potential of CCIs. This challenge was also highlighted by speakers at the 2nd Conference on CCIs, held from December 4 to 8, 2024, in Rabat. Indeed, innovative startups and cultural entrepreneurs still face enormous difficulties accessing funding dedicated to cultural innovation and financial resources that match their ambitions. This obviously significantly hinders and limits their capacity for innovation, their risk-taking in cultural and creative projects and initiatives, and consequently impacts their international visibility. In this context, it should be noted that several countries such as the United Kingdom, Canada, France and South Korea have overcome this challenge by launching innovative and ambitious programs for financing and promoting cultural innovation in public-private partnership mode.

The second most frequently cited challenge concerns the governance of Moroccan creative and cultural entrepreneurial ecosystems, which are marked by a multiplicity of actors, a lack of interministerial coordination, and the absence of a unified and integrated vision uniting all stakeholders in these cultural and creative industries. As for the third challenge, it is the lack of sufficient and highly qualified human skills in these creative and cultural fields, which can accompany and support the development of these sectors in the era of artificial

intelligence and disruptive, emerging and especially immersive technologies, in particular those relating to virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), mixed reality (MR), holograms, the metaverse, digital twins and many other innovative technologies which are invading the global cultural and creative field more than ever.

The fourth challenge is related to the infrastructure and technological deficits for cultural and creative innovation, marked in particular by limited access to immersive technologies and a concentration of infrastructure in major Moroccan cities. Other challenges impacting the CCIs ecosystems and limiting their innovation potential have been highlighted. These include the obsolescence and inadequacy of the legal and regulatory framework, which is unfavourable to innovation and does not meet the specific and urgent needs of these industries (intellectual property, CCIs taxation, status of artists, informality, etc.). In addition, other obstacles to innovation in these creative and cultural sectors were highlighted, such as the low capacity in cultural R&D, the weak entrepreneurial structuring of these cultural and creative industries, the reliable international presence and visibility of CCIs on an international scale, the low digitalization of the sector and the weak presence on global platforms.

6. Strategic Levers of Development to Increase the Innovative Potential of CCIs for Strengthening Moroccan Cultural Diplomacy

Based on the initiatives highlighted and the challenges already addressed by our research, it appears relevant to propose a conceptual model focused on innovation as a driving force of CCIs which consequently strengthens cultural diplomacy and drives a new cultural diplomatic dynamic and ultimately impacts Moroccan soft power and influence in a dynamic, cyclical and continuous interaction.

Thus, our conceptual model, as shown below, is designed as a structuring abstraction of our reflection and analysis. It demonstrates the ultimate goal, namely soft power embodied by a strong Moroccan brand image and a radiant positioning supported by effective, modern cultural diplomacy based on multidimensional innovation.

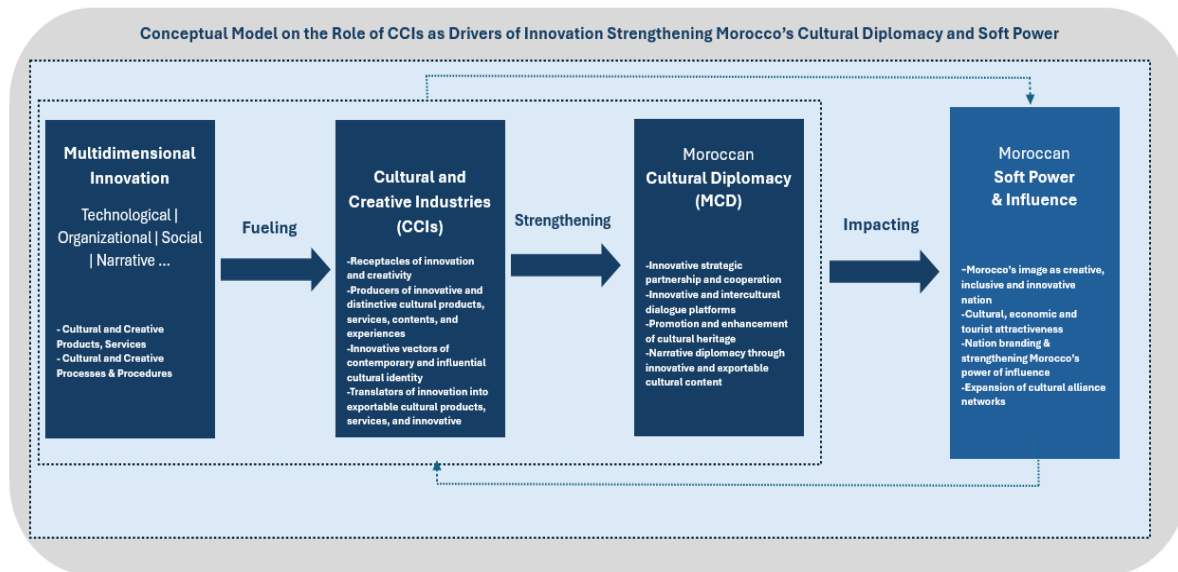


Figure 4: Conceptual Model on the Role of CCIs as Drivers of Innovation for Strengthening Morocco's Cultural Diplomacy and Soft Power

Thus, to achieve these objectives, and also based on our benchmarking of international best practices, particularly those of the United Kingdom, France, Germany, China and South Korea, we have identified the following strategic axes, with the common thread of innovation permeating the entire cultural field and all Moroccan creative and cultural industries and sectors:



Figure 5: Strategic Levers to increase Innovative Potential of Moroccan CCI's

6.1 New Agile and Innovative Governance

Among the recommendations most frequently mentioned by our survey population, agile and synergistic innovative governance ranks first. This demonstrates the critical importance of governance in its various innovative, ethical, and procedural dimensions of coordination, monitoring, control, and evaluation. We believe that good governance of all Moroccan cultural and creative entrepreneurial ecosystems requires, above all, a renewed and innovative strategic vision within the framework of a holistic approach that unites all sectors and all stakeholders without exception (public actors, private actors, civil society actors, academic actors, actors of high and popular culture, representation of all artistic sensibilities and regions, etc.).

New mechanisms and tools for coordination, collaboration, consultation, and communication should be designed and inspired by the pioneering British, Canadian and South Korean experiences. This should be implemented within the framework of a new public-private structure to strategically steer the integrated national strategy for innovative CCI's and ensure that they effectively contribute to strengthening Morocco's cultural diplomacy and soft power.

6.2 A Legislative and Regulatory Framework That Encourages and Supports the Innovative Dynamics of the Moroccan CCI's

The legal and regulatory arsenal is a second lever to be taken very seriously to be in tune with international standards and support the dynamics of Moroccan cultural and creative innovation. Indeed, at this level, it is necessary to put in place legislation that encourages and promotes the act of creating, innovating, investing, getting involved in the CCI's, producing cultural goods and services that promote Moroccan cultural heritage and can be easily exported internationally.

At this level, we recommend updating and modernizing the legal corpus to promote innovative CCI's and support their development so that Moroccan entrepreneurial, cultural and creative ecosystems can resolve all the issues hindering their development and limiting their innovative and creative potential. To this end, it is necessary to directly and effectively address the issues of intellectual property and copyright, the various administrative and bureaucratic constraints of investment, financing, taxation, incentive measures for the export of Moroccan cultural products and services, support for artists and cultural creators, and small and medium-sized Moroccan cultural enterprises. It is also necessary to ensure the supervision and institutionalization of new innovative cultural practices such as crowdfunding, and the various alternative and innovative means and tools for financing

cultural start-ups (public-private partnerships in the creative and cultural fields, crowdfunding, cultural patronage, innovative and specialized investment funds, venture capital, business angels, etc.).

6.3 Digital Innovation in CCI to Successfully Undertake Their Internal Digital Transformation and Promote Their International Exportability

For CCIs to maximize their growth potential and their role in strengthening Moroccan cultural diplomacy, a major effort should be made to ensure the digital transformation of the Moroccan CCI sector. Indeed, under the combined impact of technological developments and global cultural dynamics, the digitalization of CCIs is no longer a choice, but an absolute necessity to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of Moroccan cultural and creative entrepreneurial ecosystems. Therefore, we recommend integrating CCIs into the programs and projects planned in the national strategy "Digital Morocco 2030," considering the creation of applications and platforms based on artificial intelligence and other emerging and creative technologies such as immersive technologies (virtual reality, augmented reality, mixed reality, cultural holograms, cultural digital twins, etc.).

Digital innovation can also take several forms, such as the creation of innovative digital streaming platforms and virtual tours of Moroccan museums, as well as the country's various monuments and cultural resources. It can also involve imagining new ways and methods of creating, innovating, producing, and disseminating Moroccan cultural goods and services abroad, thereby increasing the visibility of CCIs and strengthening Morocco's cultural cooperation relations with countries around the world. It is very beneficial for cultural entrepreneurs, artists, creators, startups, cultural SMEs and the various actors of the Moroccan CCIS ecosystem to modernize, internationalize, connect to the global cultural market and to the various partnership initiatives and cultural exchanges with other countries, for greater influence, visibility and impact of the CCIS.

6.4 Financial Innovation and Massive and Diversified Investment in CCIs

Innovation in Moroccan cultural diplomacy is closely linked to innovation in CCIs, which themselves remain correlated with creativity and innovation in the financial field to imagine new, innovative alternative financing methods that can solve the problems of scarce financial resources, such as Public Private Partnerships (PPPs), crowdfunding, and innovative collaborative projects to increase and diversify the funding sources of Moroccan CCIs. Indeed, it is necessary to have the means to match one's ambitions by creating innovative cultural funds to finance various Moroccan cultural programs, projects, and initiatives both in Morocco and abroad. While Morocco has created a Cultural Development Fund, which has financially supported several film and musical cultural projects, even professionals in the field believe it remains limited and deserves to be expanded to other creative and cultural sectors to support Morocco's cultural diplomatic momentum on the global stage.

6.5 Creative and Innovative Talent and Capacity Building for Cultural Stakeholders and Entrepreneurs

The Moroccan cultural and creative entrepreneurial ecosystems should have a new generation of creative and innovative talents capable of meeting the current and future challenges of the CCIs and Moroccan cultural diplomacy in the era of new disruptive technologies and global cultural competition between countries. This is a necessary condition for the CCIs to have the desired impact and to serve as real transmission belts and strategic levers for Moroccan cultural diplomacy.

In addition, it is recommended to strengthen the capacities of Moroccan cultural stakeholders and entrepreneurs through initial and continuing training programs to increase their skills and align them with the country's strategic orientations in terms of global visibility, influence, and cultural influence. It should be emphasized in this context that innovation at this level inevitably involves the professionalization of human capital, the stimulation of its creative sense in addition to the internalization of Moroccan creative and innovative talents of the engaging vision of the Kingdom in terms of cultural diplomacy and soft power by promoting the tangible and intangible cultural heritage and the symbolic and cultural resources of Morocco.

6.6 Partnership Innovation and Creative and Cultural Cooperation

Moroccan cultural and creative industries ecosystems require an integrated and innovative strategy for partnership and cooperation at the national and international levels in the creative and cultural fields.

Indeed, the strengthening of cultural exchange programs and initiatives should be designed and implemented in a forward-looking and imaginative spirit of convergence and coordination between the various national and

international public, private, and associative stakeholders in the Moroccan CCI ecosystem, with the involvement of regions and municipalities in strengthening and developing cultural and creative industries.

In this context, it is strongly recommended to increase and especially diversify partnership and cooperation agreements, both bilateral and multilateral, in priority areas of common interest to further develop the capacities of Moroccan CCIs and promote their export and internationalization. At this level, it is essential to launch new innovative cultural initiatives (new collaborative platforms, new innovative products and services, new labels, festivals, cultural exhibitions, trade fairs, foundations, etc.).

7. Conclusion

This paper explored the strategic role that cultural and creative industries can play as driving forces in strengthening Morocco's cultural diplomacy and soft power. It highlighted the centrality of innovation and creativity and their structuring and modernizing impact on Moroccan cultural and creative entrepreneurial ecosystems.

Our interviews with professionals, experts, and stakeholders in these cultural and creative fields showed that the most frequently repeated and underlying themes that permeate their discourse and emerge with high frequency in their narratives regarding innovation are, above all, the innovation mindset, creative and innovative DNA, growth drivers, transmission belts, led-innovation CCI, agile creativity, augmented and innovative Moroccan cultural diplomacy and soft power.

For the Moroccan cultural diplomatic machine to be innovative, the cultural and creative industries (CCIs) should be truly powerful and innovative transmission belts. Thus, by placing innovation at the heart of the CCIs, Morocco is directing its potential towards performance and inserting its cultural and creative entrepreneurial environment into an internationalization approach, global cultural influence combining agility, innovation and creativity and based above all on symbolic narrative storytelling, emotion and multidimensional innovation.

The results of our research also allowed us to identify levers of development within the framework of a conceptual model as a strategic framework for action for an optimal, effective and integrated integration of innovative CCIs in Moroccan cultural diplomacy.

Furthermore, this research has also opened new research perspectives concerning in particular the evaluation of the effectiveness and efficiency of the different initiatives and approaches of cultural and creative ecosystems for the strengthening of Moroccan cultural diplomacy, in addition to the impact of new emerging, immersive and disruptive technologies such as artificial intelligence, virtual reality, augmented reality, mixed reality, metaverse and blockchain, on cultural diplomacy, nation branding and soft power of Morocco.

Ethics Statement

This paper complies with ethical principles. No formal ethics approval was required, and all interviews were conducted with informed consent and fully anonymity.

AI Statement

The content of this paper and also all analyses, writing and conclusions are the original creation of the authors without the use of any AI tool.

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