

## **Territorial Economic Intelligence and the Competitiveness of CSR-Labeled SMEs: What Relationship?**

### **L'intelligence économique territoriale et la compétitivité des PME labellisées RSE : Quelle relation ?**

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## Abstract

This article explores the dynamic relationship between territorial economic intelligence (TEI) and the CSR labeling of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). We highlight the mechanisms of TEI that enable SMEs to collect, analyze, and utilize strategic information about their local environment while underscoring the competitive advantages that CSR labeling can bring. Through a comprehensive analysis, we examine how TEI influences the strategies of SMEs, particularly those that have achieved CSR labels, and assess the potential synergies that emerge from this interaction. Ultimately, this reflection leads to the proposal of a conceptual model illustrating this relationship, along with hypotheses examining the link between TEI and the strategic development of enterprises. The findings emphasize the importance of an integrated approach to encourage the adoption of CSR within SMEs and to enhance their competitiveness in an increasingly sustainability-focused market.

**Keywords:** Territorial Economic Intelligence, corporate Social Responsibility, CSR Labeling, Sustainable development, competitiveness.

## Résumé

Cet article explore la relation dynamique entre l'intelligence économique territoriale (IET) et la labellisation en matière de Responsabilité Sociétale des Entreprises (RSE) des petites et moyennes entreprises (PME). Nous mettons en lumière les mécanismes de l'IET, qui permettent aux PME de collecter, analyser et utiliser des informations stratégiques sur leur environnement local, tout en soulignant les avantages compétitifs que la labellisation RSE peut apporter. À travers une analyse approfondie, nous examinons comment l'IET influence la stratégie des PME, en particulier celles qui ont obtenu des labels RSE, et nous évaluons les synergies potentielles qui émergent de cette interaction. En fin de compte, cette réflexion aboutit à la proposition d'un modèle conceptuel illustrant cette relation, accompagné d'hypothèses qui examinent le lien entre l'IET et le développement stratégique des entreprises. Les résultats mettent en évidence l'importance d'une approche intégrée pour encourager l'adoption de la RSE au sein des PME et pour améliorer leur compétitivité dans un marché de plus en plus axé sur la durabilité.

**Mots clés :** Intelligence économique territoriale, RSE, labellisation RSE, développement durable, Compétitivité.

## Introduction

In a rapidly changing global economic context, marked by environmental, social and economic crises, companies are facing unprecedented challenges. The need to adopt sustainable and responsible practices is becoming ever more pressing, both to meet growing consumer expectations and to comply with increasingly stringent regulations. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which account for a significant share of the economy and employment, play a crucial role in this transition. However, they must navigate a complex landscape where competitiveness and social responsibility must coexist. In this context, territorial economic intelligence (TEI) is emerging as a powerful strategic tool. By enabling the collection, analysis and dissemination of relevant information at local level, EIT helps SMEs to better understand their environment, identify market opportunities, and position themselves favorably against their competitors. At the same time, CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) labeling is an essential lever for SMEs wishing to affirm their commitment to sustainable and ethical practices.

However, one key question remains:

### **What is the relationship between territorial economic intelligence and CSR labeling for SMEs?**

In other words, how do these two concepts interact to strengthen the competitiveness of SMEs while promoting their social responsibility? This raises questions about the mechanisms for integrating CSR into SME strategy, and the role played by EIT in this process.

The objectives of this research are as follows:

1. Analyze the theoretical foundations of territorial economic intelligence and CSR to identify the links and possible synergies between these two concepts.
2. Assess the impact of EIT on the adoption of CSR practices within SMEs, identifying the factors that facilitate this integration.
3. To propose a conceptual framework that illustrates how EIT can support the strategic development of CSR-labeled SMEs.

To address this issue, we have adopted a rigorous methodology based on an in-depth review of the scientific literature, enabling us to carry out an exhaustive analysis of existing work and guarantee the reliability and relevance of the data used.

To structure our analysis, we will organize our study around three main axes. First, we'll look at the foundations of territorial economic intelligence, clarifying its definitions, theories and mechanisms. Secondly, we will look at CSR labeling for SMEs, highlighting its advantages and

the characteristics of its implementation. Finally, we will analyze the relationship between territorial economic intelligence and CSR labeling, exploring possible synergies for SMEs. This approach will enable us to better understand how EIT can act as a strategic lever for the integration of CSR, strengthening the performance and sustainability of SMEs in their economic and territorial environment.

This article stands out for its integrative approach, which not only synthesizes existing knowledge on territorial economic intelligence and the competitiveness of CSR-labeled SMEs but also identifies gaps and proposes new conceptual avenues for better understanding territorial dynamics in a constantly evolving economic context.

## **1. Review of theoretical literature on Territorial Economic Intelligence (TEI)**

### **1.1. Definition of territorial economic intelligence (TEI)**

Territorial economic intelligence (TEI) is a relatively recent concept, closely linked to economic intelligence (Herbaux, 2007; François, 2008). It can be defined as a territory's ability to anticipate socio-economic changes and manage the knowledge they generate (Moinet, 2011). EIT refers to all actions carried out at local level to gather, analyze and disseminate strategic information likely to improve the competitiveness of companies and the territory. It is based on collaboration between public (local governments, development agencies) and private (SMEs, large corporations) players, with the aim of attractiveness and sustainable economic development. It gives companies access to information specific to their geographical environment, giving them a competitive edge in their activities.

### **1.2. Theories used in territorial economic intelligence**

The interest of this point lies in the need to explore the theories underlying territorial economic intelligence (TEI), as they offer an essential conceptual framework for understanding how companies can exploit their local environment. By examining these theories, we can better understand the mechanisms by which EIT strengthens the competitiveness of companies within their territory.

- **Territorial competitiveness theory (Porter, 1990):**

Michael Porter's theory of territorial competitiveness asserts that a company's performance is determined not only by its internal capabilities, but also by the characteristics of its territorial environment. Porter introduces the concept of “clusters”, which are geographical groupings of

interconnected companies, institutions and suppliers. Clusters foster innovation and growth by creating synergies and facilitating the exchange of ideas. In the context of the EIT, this theory underlines the importance of a dynamic local ecosystem for the development of SMEs, which can take advantage of the resources and skills available in their territory.

- **Social network theory (Granovetter, 1985):**

Granovetter's (1985) social network theory highlights the importance of social relations in economic activities, particularly within territories. Granovetter develops the concept of “embeddedness”, which asserts that economic actions are profoundly influenced by social relationships. These connections, whether strong or weak, play a central role in access to information, the establishment of trust and cooperation between economic players. Weak ties in particular are crucial to the dissemination of new ideas and innovation, as they connect diverse social networks. In the context of territorial economic intelligence (TEI), SMEs benefit from an essential strategic tool that enables them to collect and analyze relevant information at local level. This helps them to better understand their environment, identify market opportunities and position themselves against the competition. Social network theory shows that integration into networks of local players strengthens their competitiveness, as these networks facilitate the sharing of knowledge and access to shared resources. These interactions create a climate of trust and collaboration, key elements for the sustainable development and success of SMEs in a competitive environment.

- **Open innovation theory (Chesbrough, 2003):**

It argues that companies should not restrict themselves to their own resources to innovate, but rather explore ideas, technologies and skills outside their organizational boundaries. This approach is particularly relevant to (SMEs) in the context of territorial economic intelligence (TEI), as they can benefit from a local environment rich in expertise and partnerships. Open innovation encourages the sharing of knowledge and ideas within the territory, enabling companies to boost their development and adapt to market changes. In short, these three theories, though distinct, share the common goal of improving the competitiveness of companies within their territorial environment. By combining Porter's cluster approach, the importance of Granovetter's social networks and Chesbrough's open innovation, we obtain an integrated vision of the dynamics underlying territorial economic intelligence. This perspective enables us to better understand how SMEs can navigate a complex economic landscape, drawing on the resources available in their territory, forging strategic relationships and adopting collaborative innovation practices. Ultimately, these theories highlight the potential of EIT as a

strategic lever for companies seeking to optimize their performance and stand out in a competitive market.

### **1.3. Key Mechanisms of Territorial Economic Intelligence (TEI)**

The mechanisms of Territorial Economic Intelligence (TEI) are essential levers for companies seeking to thrive in their local environment. By integrating effective processes and tools, EIT enables companies to collect, analyze and disseminate strategic information, which is crucial for informed decision-making. In a world where competitiveness increasingly depends on collaboration and innovation, it is vital to master these mechanisms. They offer economic players the opportunity to fully exploit the assets of their territory. Key elements of the EIT include:

- **Strategic watch**

According to Lesca (2001) and Rouach & Santi (2001), strategic watch can take different forms depending on the phases it covers, and the tasks associated with it. It is described in the literature as a practice enabling organizations to gather sensitive information on opportunities, scientific or technological innovations, as well as potential threats that may affect their competitive position (Calof & Smith, 2010; Salvador et al., 2014). Business intelligence is an essential process by which companies actively monitor their environment, including technological, competitive and regulatory aspects. This enables them to identify opportunities that can be exploited and potential threats that could affect their business. At a territorial level, it is not limited to individual action; it often involves collaboration between various local players such as companies, public institutions and research organizations. By working together, these players can share information, analyze market trends and identify best practices. This not only strengthens business resilience but also contributes to a collective innovation dynamic within the territory.

- **Public-private partnerships**

Public-private partnerships (PPPs) play a crucial role in supporting the development of local businesses. These collaborations between the public and private sectors optimize available resources, offering companies access to financing, appropriate infrastructure and strategic information. Local governments and development agencies are actively involved in creating and managing these partnerships, facilitating the dissemination of information that can be

decisive for business growth. These initiatives help to strengthen the local economic ecosystem, fostering an environment conducive to innovation and business competitiveness.

- **Company networks**

Business networks, such as clusters and competitiveness clusters, are essential mechanisms for facilitating the sharing of information and innovation between (SMEs). By bringing together companies with common interests, these networks encourage collaboration and the exchange of ideas, which is particularly beneficial for SMEs, which are often limited in terms of resources. What's more, these structures make it possible to pool costly resources, such as research and development (R&D), which is essential for SMEs that don't always have the capacity to invest in innovation projects on their own. By creating an environment where companies can collaborate and innovate together, business networks boost the competitiveness of the entire region.

## 2. Research Methodology

We follow a rigorous methodology based on the analysis of a systematic review of scientific literature. This narrative documentary study is based on an in-depth review of the scientific literature concerning territorial economic intelligence (TEI) and the competitiveness of SMEs labelled Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). The bibliographic search was carried out using recognized academic databases such as Scopus, Web of Science and Google Scholar, to ensure the quality and reliability of the results.

Publication selection criteria included:

- **A publication period:** ranging from 2003 to 2024, ensuring the integration of the most recent research and contemporary developments in EIT.
- **Credibility of sources**, by selecting only articles from prestigious scientific journals and institutions specializing in business intelligence.
- **Explicit territorial impact**, with priority given to studies that directly analyze the influence of EIT on the economic, social and environmental development of territories.
- **Geographical diversity**, enabling us to understand EIT issues in different regional and national contexts around the world.

Keywords used in the research include: “economic intelligence”, “territorial economic intelligence”, “territorial competitiveness”, “territorial development” and “SME CSR”. The



analysis is mainly based on a positive epistemological paradigm, with a hypothetico-deductive approach aimed at articulating theory and practice to understand territorial dynamics.

A total of 25 articles were analyzed as part of this study. The methodology adopted was based on a rigorous selection of documents, founded on strict criteria of relevance and scientific reliability, followed by an in-depth, qualitative analysis of each publication. The narrative review of the literature was carried out manually, without recourse to automated textual analysis tools, enabling careful reading and interpretation of the results of the selected studies.

The aim of this work was to gain a deeper understanding of the role of Territorial Economic Intelligence (TEI) in the development of territories, particularly for SMEs with a Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) label. EIT is proving to be an essential lever in providing relevant strategic information and facilitating the creation of collaborative networks, key elements in an economic environment marked by increasing competition and complexity. An analysis of the publications has enabled us to identify the best practices and EIT tools that can be mobilized to provide effective support to territories and their responsible SMEs. These resources contribute to their adaptation to market demands, while supporting sustainable growth and enhanced competitiveness. These results highlight the importance of a proactive territorial economic intelligence approach, capable of considering local specificities and supporting the responsible development of SMEs.

### **3. CSR certification for SMEs**

#### **3.1. Labeling**

Labeling appears to be an alternative to normative certification, offering companies a means of testifying to the quality of their practices. According to the Larousse dictionary and the French Consumer Code, a label is defined as an attestation of conformity to specific specifications (Larceneux, 2003). This notion can be analyzed from two main perspectives: the marketing approach and the legal approach. From a marketing perspective, Bouhaouala and Bouchet (2007) see labeling as a mechanism that enables companies to make their quality promises credible and accessible, while guaranteeing the sustainability of these standards during the service offering. Unlike a simple brand, a label commits companies to a process of continuous quality improvement (Larceneux, 2003). From a legal point of view, a label is a collective mark, held by a certifying body which controls its attribution and can withdraw approval if necessary (Bouhaouala & Bouchet, 2007). In practical terms, the label is perceived as a reliable signal,



serving as a communication tool to inform consumers about aspects of quality that may be difficult to assess. This reduces the informational asymmetry between producers and consumers, playing an essential role in the transparency of trade. Labeling refers to the awarding of a label certifying that a company complies with recognized standards or norms in a particular field. In the context of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), this translates into recognition of a company's commitment to sustainable development, ethics and responsible management.

### 3.2. Definition of CSR

**Table 1 : Definition of CSR**

<b>Author</b>	<b>Definition/Perspective</b>	<b>Analysis</b>
<b>Bowen (1953)</b>	CSR is about taking values into account when making business decisions.	Establishes an ethical basis for the development of the concept, emphasizing that the actions of managers must be aligned with societal values.
<b>Caroll (1979)</b>	CSR encompasses economic, legal, ethical and philanthropic expectations.	Enriches Bowen's vision by pointing out that CSR involves a variety of corporate commitments to society, going beyond mere adherence to values.
<b>Freeman (1984)</b>	CSR must include the notion of stakeholders, underlining the importance of meeting the expectations of a wide range of players.	Emphasizes the interactive nature of CSR, where companies must engage in dialogue with stakeholders to integrate their concerns.
<b>Pesqueux (2008)</b>	CSR is the formalization of responses to stakeholder demands.	Reinforces the need for companies to be reactive and proactive in the face of societal challenges, establishing a link between CSR and relationship management.

**Source: prepared by the authors**

CSR refers to a company's responsibility for its impact on society and the environment. Companies that adopt CSR voluntarily consider the expectations of stakeholders (employees, customers, local communities, shareholders) and integrate the principles of sustainable development into their day-to-day activities. According to ISO 26000, CSR covers areas such

as human rights, labor relations, the environment, fair business practices, consumer issues and contribution to local development.

### **3.3. CSR Labels and Standards**

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) labels and standards play an essential role in the creation of shared value, a concept introduced by Porter and Kramer (2006, 2011). Their main function is to mitigate informational asymmetry by providing stakeholders with tangible evidence of companies' commitments to responsible practices. This role is particularly significant for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which may sometimes find traditional labels insufficient. Contrary to a rigid definition, CSR labels are dynamic and vary according to the sectors and players involved. As Robert-Demontrond and Joyeau (2007) point out, these labels are flexible and adaptable, reflecting the diversity of organizational realities. Indeed, CSR labeling is not subject to a single model and can be defined at different levels: depending on the scope of the themes addressed (social, environmental), the sectoral or multi-sectoral specificity of the label, and its application on a global or local scale within a company. So, rather than looking for an ideal benchmark, it makes more sense to recognize that each company has the ability to shape its CSR approach to suit its own particular needs. This approach enables labels to become key tools for building trust and transparency in relations between companies and their stakeholders.

### **3.4. CSR in the context of SMEs**

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) has long been an underexplored topic, often overshadowed by studies of large companies (Courrent, 2012; Jenkins, 2009). However, growing awareness of the impact of SMEs on economic, social and environmental dimensions has led to increased attention on CSR in this segment. Due to their size and structure, SMEs adopt approaches to CSR that differ considerably from those of larger companies, often being influenced by the personal characteristics of their leaders (Jenkins, 2004; Paradas et al., 2017). In this context, the owner-manager's strategic vision plays a key role in the integration of CSR practices. Unlike large companies, where CSR is often more formally structured, initiatives in SMEs are frequently determined by the individual perspective of managers. Successful integration of CSR thus requires a strategic reorientation towards more sustainable practices, which may be less systematic and more based on the personal commitment of the executive (Asselineau and Cromarias, 2011; Saulquin and Schier,

2007). The local context in which SMEs operate is also a key factor influencing their approach to CSR. Geographic proximity and territorial anchoring modulate the adoption of CSR practices, and there is a growing recognition of the importance of local realities, particularly in the Global South. These realities shape the way SMEs integrate CSR into their operations (Torrès, 2000; Paradas, 2006; Ben Boubaker Gherib et al., 2009; Biwolé, 2014; Spence et al., 2011). Exploring the CSR approaches of Moroccan SMEs is therefore particularly important. Although often informal, the commitment of these companies reflects a growing desire to meet stakeholder expectations and contribute to sustainable development while considering the challenges and specificities of their local environment. The integration of CSR into Moroccan SMEs highlights a paradigm shift in which these companies, even those of modest size, are becoming aware of their role in society. This trend can be seen as a response to external pressures and the growing expectations of consumers and partners, who favor responsible and sustainable practices. Moreover, the flexibility of SMEs allows them to quickly adapt their strategies according to the needs and aspirations of their community, giving them a competitive advantage in the local market. However, this approach also poses challenges, particularly in terms of resources and training. SMEs may encounter difficulties in establishing formal structures for CSR, thus limiting the impact of their initiatives. Institutional support and access to awareness-raising tools are therefore essential to strengthen SMEs' capacities to systematically integrate CSR. In short, although Moroccan SMEs demonstrate a willingness to commit to CSR, it is crucial to support these efforts with public policies and support initiatives to maximize their contribution to sustainable development.

### **3.5. The benefits of CSR for SMEs**

In the context of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), implementing a corporate social responsibility (CSR) approach offers several notable benefits that can positively influence their development. These benefits, analyzed from different perspectives, offer SMEs opportunities to improve their image, optimize their resources, strengthen their market position, and meet the expectations of their stakeholders. Here is an overview of the main benefits that SMEs can derive from CSR:

**Table 2: The benefits of CSR for SMEs**

Type of Advantage	Description	Sources
<b>Economic Benefits</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improvement of the company's image and employee motivation (intangible).</li> <li>• Tangible savings, such as reduced energy and waste management costs.</li> </ul>	Jenkins (2006), Courrent (2012), Berger-Douce (2011)
<b>Improved Stakeholder Relationships</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open communication and proactive engagement with stakeholders enhance trust and support for the company.</li> </ul>	Freeman (1984); Pfeffer & Salancik (1978)
<b>Competitive Advantages</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthening of competitive position, especially with major clients who favor CSR-committed partners.</li> <li>• Market differentiation and access to new business opportunities.</li> </ul>	Spence et al. (2011)
<b>Compliance and Risk Reduction</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Compliance with regulations and reduction of legal, reputational, and operational risks.</li> </ul>	—
<b>Overall Performance Benefits</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meeting stakeholders' expectations.</li> <li>• Positive impact of training and skills development on internal performance.</li> <li>• Investment in intangible assets such as trust and employee engagement.</li> </ul>	Berger-Douce (2008), Mathieu & Renaud (2005)
<b>Easier Access to Funding</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved credibility and transparency can facilitate access to financial resources.</li> </ul>	—
<b>Other Benefits</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Risk reduction.</li> <li>• Better employee engagement.</li> <li>• Access to new markets.</li> </ul>	Jenkins (2006), Berger-Douce (2014)

**Source: prepared by the authors**

### 3.6. Factors for integrating CSR into labeled SMEs

The integration of corporate social responsibility (CSR) in certified SMEs results from a set of complex and often interconnected factors. These factors can be classified into several

categories:

- **Leader's Vision:** The leader's personal conviction about the importance of CSR plays a key role. Their strategic vision and personal commitment can inspire and profoundly influence corporate culture.
- **Corporate Culture:** A corporate culture focused on human values, ethics, and social responsibility encourages the adoption of CSR practices.
- **Company Size:** Although SMEs are generally more flexible, very small businesses (VSBs) may encounter financial obstacles when implementing certain CSR initiatives.
- **Industry:** Certain sectors, being more exposed to environmental or social issues, can encourage companies to adopt CSR practices more proactively.
- **Company History:** Companies with a tradition of responsible practices are often more inclined to pursue this approach, influenced by external factors in the company.

#### 4. The Relationship Between Territorial Economic Intelligence and CSR Labeling for SMEs

In the era of the transition to more sustainable economic models, the interaction between Territorial Economic Intelligence (TEI), Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), and strategic business development is becoming essential. Although these concepts are distinct, they share common objectives: strengthening competitiveness, fostering sustainability, and increasing business resilience. By integrating local, social, and environmental dimensions, these complementary approaches help shape a responsible and innovative economic environment while addressing contemporary challenges. TEI enables businesses to collect and analyze strategic information about their local and global environment. By implementing monitoring and knowledge management mechanisms, TEI helps businesses anticipate economic, social, and technological trends, thus conferring a competitive advantage. It is a lever for innovation and adaptation, identifying growth opportunities while mitigating risks. At the same time, CSR encourages companies to adopt ethical and responsible practices, integrating environmental and social criteria into their strategic decisions. Stakeholders, including consumers, investors, and regulators, are increasingly demanding this type of positioning. The ETI plays a crucial role by providing relevant data and local insights, facilitating the integration of CSR principles into the decision-making process. For example, it can highlight the specific expectations of a community, allowing companies to tailor their CSR actions in a targeted manner. Strategic

development relies on the ability to reconcile economic performance with adaptation to societal and environmental challenges. As an anticipation and steering tool, EIT combines with CSR to provide the tools and values needed to navigate an uncertain environment. It helps identify opportunities for sustainable innovation and establish strategic local partnerships, fostering the creation of shared value. Companies committed to sound CSR strategies can position themselves as responsible actors, strengthening stakeholder trust and improving their overall performance. EIT also enables targeted strategic monitoring, allowing companies to track economic, social, and environmental developments in real time. This active monitoring helps them anticipate regulatory changes and stakeholder expectations, thus adapting their CSR actions to local needs. Furthermore, it facilitates the analysis of risks and opportunities, identifying the company's potential impacts while highlighting avenues for sustainable growth, such as the development of ecological technologies or partnerships with committed local stakeholders. Optimizing relationships with local stakeholders is a major asset. By using IET tools, companies can better understand local dynamics and strengthen their ties with communities, associations, and citizens. This fosters the co-construction of relevant social and environmental initiatives and establishes strategic partnerships that amplify the impact of CSR at the local level. The IET also plays a crucial role in promoting territorial innovation. By identifying innovative local actors and emerging trends in sustainable development, companies can direct their investments toward ecological and socially responsible solutions, thus maintaining their competitiveness while fulfilling their CSR commitments. Furthermore, active regulatory monitoring helps anticipate new environmental and social standards, promoting the adoption of practices that comply with future regulations.

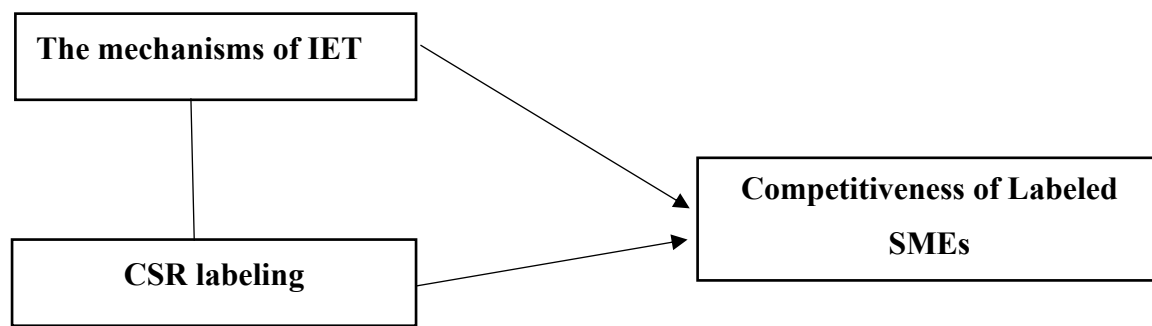
The impact of the IET on the reputation and brand image of companies engaged in CSR is significant. By relying on the information provided by the IET, companies can better communicate their commitments and their contribution to local development. A good communication strategy, based on solid data, reinforces the company's image as a responsible and committed player, thus attracting customers, investors, and talent sensitive to societal issues. In summary, the IET is a powerful tool that strengthens the ability of companies engaged in CSR to anticipate, innovate, and create shared value. By proactively integrating social responsibility issues into their overall strategy, these companies maximize their positive impact on the territory. Thanks to a better understanding of their territorial environment, the IET plays a crucial role in the economic, social and environmental performance of companies engaged in a CSR approach.

## 5. Conceptual model and hypotheses

### 5.1. Model

The proposed conceptual model aims to examine how Territorial Economic Intelligence (TEI) facilitates the integration of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) practices within small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). It highlights the interaction between strategic information gathering and SMEs' social engagement. This model is based on the idea that TEI can become a key lever for improving the sustainability and competitiveness of SMEs.

**Figure 1: Conceptual Model**



**Source: Prepared by the authors.**

### 5.2. Hypotheses

**H1:** Territorial Economic Intelligence (TEI) mechanisms, such as strategic watch and stakeholder analysis, promote the adoption of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) practices among certified SMEs.

**H2:** The integration of CSR practices, supported by the TEI, improves the reputation and brand image of certified SMEs, contributing to their market competitiveness.

**H3:** Certified SMEs that leverage the strategic information provided by the TEI are more likely to develop innovative CSR initiatives, thereby strengthening their competitive advantage.

**H4:** The interaction between the TEI and CSR leads to a better understanding of consumer expectations and sustainable consumption trends, leading to increased sales and customer loyalty for certified SMEs.

**H5:** Labeled SMEs that adopt CSR practices in response to IET recommendations see an improvement in their economic performance, which strengthens their long-term competitiveness.



## 6. General summary

This work highlights the crucial role of Territorial Economic Intelligence (TEI) as a lever to promote the adoption of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) by small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). By integrating the mechanisms of TEI with the benefits of CSR labeling, SMEs can not only improve their economic performance but also strengthen their social and environmental impact. By providing relevant strategic information, TEI allows SMEs to better understand local dynamics and identify societal expectations regarding sustainability. This gives them the opportunity to develop initiatives adapted to the specific needs of their territories, while aligning with the values of their customers and partners. By integrating responsible and sustainable practices, SMEs can also distinguish themselves in the market by creating products and services that address growing consumer concerns regarding ethics and sustainability. Thus, access to strategic local data becomes a major asset to strengthen their competitiveness. Furthermore, this approach fosters innovation, as SMEs can identify opportunities to develop new products or services that are part of a sustainable approach. By collaborating with other local stakeholders, they can also co-construct innovative solutions that address current environmental and social issues. In short, the integration of EIT and CSR provides SMEs with a strategic framework that allows them not only to optimize their economic performance, but also to increase their positive contribution to society and the environment. In doing so, they position themselves as responsible actors, capable of adapting to contemporary challenges while continuing to grow.

## General Conclusion

Territorial economic intelligence (TEI) and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) certifications generate promising synergies for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). By facilitating access to strategic local data, TEI enables SMEs to effectively integrate sustainability principles into their business practices. This integration contributes not only to more responsible development but also to better adaptation to contemporary societal challenges. Access to accurate information on market trends, consumer expectations, and local policies helps SMEs align their strategies with growing sustainability demands. Moreover, by adopting a proactive approach based on local data, SMEs can anticipate regulatory changes and shifts in consumer preferences, strengthening their market position and resilience in the face of crises. To maximize these benefits, it is essential that public policies and financial incentives

encourage the joint adoption of TEI and CSR. Measures such as subsidies for sustainable projects, training on EIT, and tax benefits for companies adopting CSR practices can play a crucial role in this dynamic. This will not only accelerate the sustainable development of territories but also strengthen the resilience and sustainability of SMEs in a constantly changing economic environment. By leveraging synergies between EIT and CSR, SMEs can not only improve their economic performance but also become key players in the transition to a more sustainable and equitable economic model. In conclusion, the strategic alliance between EIT and CSR represents a valuable opportunity for SMEs to grow while contributing to a sustainable future. By fostering an environment conducive to the integration of these approaches, we can envision more resilient territories and an economy that values social and environmental responsibility.

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