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Examining the Mediating Effect of the Rural Economic Dynamization between the Socio-Environmental Heritage and Sustainability of Protected Areas

Yuddy Alejandra Castro Ortegón [1,*], Julio César Acosta-Prado [2], Pedro Mauricio Acosta-Castellanos [3] and Juan Pablo Romero Correa [4]

[1] Environmental Engineering Faculty, Universidad Santo Tomás, Tunja 150003, Colombia
[2] Department of Engineering, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Peru, San Miguel, Lima 15088, Peru; jcacosta@pucp.edu.pe
[3] Civil Engineering Faculty, Universidad Santo Tomás, Tunja 150001, Colombia; pedro.acosta@usantoto.edu.co
[4] Law Faculty, Universidad Santo Tomás, Tunja 150001, Colombia; juan.romero01@ustabuca.edu.co
* Correspondence: yuddy.castro@usantoto.edu.co

Abstract: This study examines the mediating effect of rural economic dynamization between socio-environmental heritage and the sustainability of protected areas in the buffer zone of the Serranía de las Quinchas Regional Natural Park, located in the municipality of Otanche, Boyacá Department, Colombia. The study population includes families that are part of the productive units in this area. The methodological approach of this study is based on partial least squares structural equation modeling. The working unit was established in the regional protected areas of Colombia, specifically in the Serranía de las Quinchas Regional Natural Park. A sample of 172 participants was selected using a non-probabilistic intentional sampling method, covering academics, company representatives, social leaders, local authorities, and representatives of non-governmental organizations. The study variables were measured using a scale with satisfactory psychometric properties, which included 12 items for socio-environmental heritage, 17 items for rural economic dynamization, and 11 items for the sustainability of protected areas. These were structured into subcategories based on the ecosystem services approach (factors that demonstrate social and economic dynamics). Responses were collected using a five-point Likert scale. The sample was analyzed using SmartPLS 3.3.3 software, applying a reflective–reflective hierarchical component model to evaluate the first- and second-order relationships among the variables. The results demonstrate the importance of socio-environmental heritage for local communities as a strategic component that facilitates the rural economic dynamization of protected areas based on sustainability. This research contributes to understanding the relationship between socio-environmental heritage and the sustainability of protected areas, mediated by rural economic dynamization, highlighting the relevance of in situ conservation strategies and prospective planning of these territories to implement sustainability dynamics. It is concluded that rural economic dynamization acts as a significant mediator in the relationship between socio-environmental heritage and the sustainability of protected areas, emphasizing the need to integrate these dynamics into the management of natural resources and the promotion of sustainable development in rural communities.

Keywords: socio-environmental heritage; sustainability of protected areas; rural economic dynamization; PLS-SEM

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1. Introduction

Sustainable development, as a complex category, is obtained from the combination of social welfare and environmental conservation. In this framework, economic growth is integrated in such a way that this development is not only equitable but also viable because it manages to satisfy the needs of economic, social, and cultural diversity and a

healthy environment for present generations without compromising the needs of future generations, thus contributing to the living conditions of the current population and avoiding significantly endangering the natural environment of future generations [1]. In this order of ideas, it is necessary to mention that environmental problems are inherent to development processes, in such a way that they modify the socioeconomic dynamics of each region, propitiating, as an essential element for sustainability, to achieve an interaction between the satisfaction of current and future human needs and aspirations, as well as the maintenance of the equilibrium of biophysical and social systems [2].

This growing concern worldwide in recent decades is the consequence of the debate on the sustainability of a planet incapable of meeting the requirements of human beings, which are certainly limited by the capacity of finite natural resources; this will lead to tension between economic and social development and its immediate effects on the natural environment [3]. Its effects on decision-makers have led governmental entities to strengthen international cooperation ties such as the 2030 Agenda, whose design was conceived to achieve a better and sustainable future for all by promoting alternatives to manage the main challenges facing humanity and recognizing that the eradication of poverty requires strategies based on economic growth, without losing sight of environmental protection and the social needs of territories [4].

Colombia is part of the 17 countries that make up the block of megadiverse countries. It is known for a large number of flora and fauna species, for having a great variety of landscapes, mining, and energy resources, with 68.7% of the surface covered by natural ecosystems. It is the first country worldwide in terms of several species of amphibians and birds, hosting 41 National Natural Parks, 11 Sanctuaries of Fauna and Flora, two National Natural Reserves, and five biosphere reserves along its five regions. The sum of all these factors makes it one of the most biodiverse countries in the world per square kilometer and an environmental power with privileged conditions, not to mention the large number of indigenous communities that inhabit the national territory, who are also part of this diversity [5].

The protected areas in Colombia are an integrated system dedicated to conserving environmental goods and services. These areas were established after the entry into force of Law 165 in 1994, on the occasion of the Convention on Biological Diversity. This law extends its protection at all levels, including ecosystems, species, and genetic resources, as well as the possible domains that are directly or indirectly related to biological diversity, and its role in development, from science to politics, education, agriculture, business, and culture [6]. Biodiversity in Colombia has led to the creation of areas with unique environmental relicts at the national level. In 2011, Decree 3572 created the National Natural Parks of Colombia as a Special Administrative Unit [7], which administers and manages both protected areas and natural parks by current regulations and the sustainable management of resources [8].

Protected areas have made it possible to conserve the unique biodiversity of the environment, allowing for the ecological interaction between flora and fauna. These protected areas constitute an environmental heritage, which is understood as a collective inheritance that, through a symbolic character, represents an identity and generates a social construction. In this sense, these protected areas allow not only the structure of an environmental heritage but also the unification of social dynamics, thus becoming a key factor in consolidating the balance among conservation, use of resources, and cultural dynamics of the environment [9].

In this context, it is determined that the sustainability of protected areas (SPA) provides ecosystem services that facilitate the development of rural community dynamics. These ecosystem services make human life possible, for example, by providing nutritious food and clean water; regulating disease and climate; supporting crop pollination and soil formation; and offering recreational, cultural, and spiritual benefits. While these assets are estimated to be worth USD 125 trillion, they do not receive adequate attention in economic policies and regulations. This means that not enough is invested in their protection or

management, leading people to develop impermissible practices throughout the shaping of their social structures, many of which are the legacy of their ancestors [10].

Thus, one proposal to reduce the negative effects on the environment due to the development of unsustainable productive activities is to reinvent the form of production that influences these special protection areas by promoting rural economic dynamization (RED). RED seeks to restructure productive planning by adapting communities to a new form of economic income, which, at the same time, contributes to eradicating rural poverty and increases the conservation of heritage without negatively affecting the provision of ecosystem services [11].

The establishment of the socio-environmental heritage (SEH) of the communities in protected areas allows for the achievement of a social construction based on the perspective of the different actors that converge in the territory. In this way, the central elements for the planning and management processes of the territory are agreed upon and identified, allowing the participants to describe processes and become the main source of information [12]. This involves structural, affective, and symbolic aspects inherent to all human beings, which is why it is necessary to study them within the decision-making process. This process is not only rational but also serves as a methodology for identifying essential rural aspects to consider in the formulation of development plans and territorial planning. Thus, these aspects become a key input in the design of natural resource management tools from a multi-skills approach based on the participation of the community and its context [13,14].

Accordingly, this paper seeks to examine the mediating effect of RED between the SEH and SPA of the buffer zone of the Serranía de las Quinchas Regional Natural Park (PNRSQ).

The originality of this work lies in the study of the role of SEH on the SPAs mediated by RED, which has not been previously studied within the buffer zone of the PNRSQ. To do so, the research question is stated as follows: What is the influence of SEH on the SPA mediated by RED in PNRSQ?

This study is divided into five sections. The first section introduced the topic and elaborated on the research problem this study aims to address. The "Literature Review" Section presents the theoretical framework regarding this study's main constructs. The procedure followed to obtain and analyze the data is presented in the "Materials and Methods" Section, while the results are explained in the "Discussion" Section. Finally, this paper ends with the "Conclusions" Section.

2. Literature Review

This section elaborates on the constructs involved in this study's theoretical model. It addresses the theory of SEH and the updated literature on the SPA. Finally, the RED literature is pinpointed as a mediator between the other two constructs.

2.1. Socio-Environmental Heritage (SEH)

According to the Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention [15], "Cultural and natural heritage is one of the priceless and irreplaceable assets not only of each nation but of humanity as a whole. The loss of one of the most precious assets, because of its degradation or disappearance, constitutes an impoverishment of the heritage of all the peoples of the world" (p. 12).

In this respect, Prats [16] found that the declaration of protected areas was a means to conserve both cultural and environmental heritage. This declaration was developed as a strategy to achieve the objectives of the in situ conservation of species and, in general, of the ecosystems of national territories, as well as guarantee the permanence of regional elements such as landscape and climate [17]. According to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), in situ conservation "is the conservation, maintenance, and recovery of viable populations in dynamic and evolving systems in the original habitat or, in the case of cultivated species, in the environment in which they have developed their characteristics" (p. 4).

According to Castro and Acosta-Prado [18], from the perspective of cultural ecosystem services, SEH promotes the balance between the conservation and use of natural resources,

as well as respect for the cultural dynamics of the environment [19]. Thus, SEH is understood as a collective inheritance that is a determining factor of symbolic character, whose capacity is to represent identity and generate a social construction [20].

This situation makes evident the need to generate better sustainable use of ecosystem services to preserve and maintain the ecological base of territories, as well as to increase the social capacity of communities and their heritages [21].

In the context of Regional Natural Parks, prior research stated that SEH is fundamental to the well-being of people in protected areas altered by development [22], including economic and social [23] and technological [24], as well as in the cultural memory and self-identification processes of the population [25]. For this reason, SEH links the natural and cultural resources that have been inherited in a geographical area and that also have notable social approval and appreciation, since they constitute the heritage acquired from those who preceded us and that must be transferred to our successors.

Although there have been some advances in understanding the multidimensionality of the economy in protected areas, it is necessary to explore and characterize more effectively the characteristics that drive economic activities in these areas. In this context, approaches such as the Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) are notable examples of self-regulation and economic dynamism. The United Nations General Assembly recently adopted a resolution recognizing the Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) as a key contributor to sustainable development. This resolution highlights the SSE's role in promoting democracy, social justice, and sustainable economic development [26].

2.2. Sustainability of Protected Areas (SPA)

Protected areas are zones of land or sea protected by law that serve various purposes, including the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity [27]. That is, protected areas are established and positioned as essential elements for the fulfillment of conservation and land use planning objectives [28].

This situation reveals a double connotation of protected areas. First, they are purely conservationist, dedicated to the maintenance of biological, ecological, and evolutionary processes of populations [28–33]. Second, they are focused on sustainable development [34–36]. In this sense, the conservation of natural resources should be carried out under guidelines that promote community development. Therefore, it is necessary to rethink the logic of areas under conservation by incorporating economic and social activities that allow the management of these natural spaces.

This management of protected areas is focused on ecosystem goods and services, understanding that the environment produces a series of elements that contribute to people's well-being. It seeks an understanding of territories as a natural base that makes it possible to maintain the productive processes that demand and depend on their ecosystem services, in terms of well-being and economic growth. In addition to being geographic spaces that possess unique landscape and physical–biotic characteristics, the presence of historical and cultural relics must be preserved using protection processes and adequate and effective management plans that guarantee the perpetuation of the existing use and non-use values in each ecosystem [37].

In this sense, conservation activities, as strategies that address environmental problems, face the challenge of integrating environmental, social, and economic dimensions. This includes incorporating the populations of the zones of influence of a protected area and consolidating them as main actors in the process of conservation and management of their SEH under a sustainable approach. These protection areas are essential to conserving natural and cultural biodiversity from the supply of ecosystem goods and services related to regulation, provisioning, culture, and support, thus allowing for the generation of sustainable socioecological systems, achieving an interrelationship between ecosystems and human society with reciprocal feedbacks and interdependencies, and understanding the interaction among cultural, political, social, economic, ecological and technological components [38].

Colombia, as a megadiverse, multicultural, and polyphonic country, has great responsibility for the conservation of national and global natural heritage. To address this task, among other strategies, it is necessary to create a system of protected areas that allows for broad and effective participation of social and institutional actors that include representative samples of each of the country's existing ecosystems and to achieve effective management in their conservation functions, given the existing human, logistical, and economic resources [39].

Within the National System of Colombian Protected Areas, the following subsystems are established: subsystems of a national, regional, departmental, municipal, provincial, and metropolitan nature. In this sense, Regional Natural Systems are defined as "the geographic space, in the landscape and strategic ecosystems on a regional scale, where a structure, composition, and function are maintained, as well as ecological and evolutionary processes", whose declaration and administration correspond to the Regional Autonomous Corporation of the area [38].

For this study, the Regional Protected Area of Colombia, specifically, the PNRSQ, was established as a work unit. It started from the premise that protected areas in Colombia, as an integrated system, are dedicated to the conservation of environmental goods and services and were born after the entry into force of Law 165 in 1994, on the Convention on Biological Diversity [6].

Therefore, it is evident that the establishment and delimitation of the PNRSQ addressed the importance demanded by the conservation objectives of the country, thus becoming a strategy to protect the perpetuity of the ecosystems, associated biodiversity, biotic communities, genetic resources, and wild species. In addition, it seeks to ensure permanence in the provision of ecosystem goods and services for the northwestern region of the Department of Boyacá [40].

According to the above, the SPA is the consequence of a set of variables; however, SEH and RED are relevant when it comes to territories such as the PNRSQ. For this reason, this study seeks to explain the influence of SEH on the SPA and RED on the SPA. These objectives determine the following hypotheses:

H1: *SEH positively influences the SPA.*

H3: *RED positively influences the SPA.*

2.3. Rural Economic Dynamization (RED)

RED is not only a strategy to promote sustainable rural development in developing countries but also an inevitable trend to improve a population's living conditions in its territory [41]. This study defines RED from the perspective of provisioning ecosystem services and understanding nature as a provider of food, raw materials, freshwater, and medicinal resources.

RED in rural areas is a growing concern in many countries where new ways of exploiting ecosystem goods and services have emerged with contextual heterogeneity in different stakeholders [42,43]. Van der Ploeg and Ye [44] argue that two competing paradigms inspire different development trajectories in terms of agricultural techniques and rural transformation. These include 1) the dominant industrial capitalist model (corporate agri-food system) and 2) alternative and multifunctional agriculture.

Yan et al. [45] argue that RED in rural areas shows new dynamization programs based on a broader strategy that allows the flow of capital to remote rural areas previously excluded from national development policy. Therefore, rural dynamization programs should be analyzed empirically to reveal new hybrid forms of governance according to territorial conditions and stakeholder participation. Government institutions and producer and consumer initiatives are involved in developing and implementing RED-oriented programs, which generally have important consequences in transforming rural economies and livelihoods [46].

Many studies have determined the influence of SEH on RED and that both variables are highly related [47–49]. This means implementing strategies to build an environment where SEH can impact RED through the correct use of ecosystem goods and services. Yang et al. [41] point out that RED is not only a strategy to promote sustainable rural development in protected areas but also an inevitable trend for the efficient management and use of ecosystem goods and services. This considers the importance of SEH in the design of activities and social, economic, and environmental programs to develop the local economy and increase employment based on available natural resources with the participation of authorities and other local stakeholders. For this reason, SEH and RED seem to have a relationship that works in a bidirectional way.

For this reason, if RED influences the SPA while it is affected by SEH, then SEH's influence on the SPA might be influenced by the mediating role of RED.

The proposed model is theoretically based on mediation because a mediating variable (RED) intervenes between two constructs that are related (SEH and SPA). This implies that a change in SEH will lead to a change in RED, which, in turn, will generate a change in the endogenous variable SPA. This mediation model seeks to analyze the intensity of RED's relationships with the other constructs, justifying the mechanisms underlying the cause–effect relationship between SEH and the SPA. This is unlike what a moderation model seeks, where the intensity or sense of the relationship among variables depends on a third variable that does not directly interact with the exogenous or endogenous variable [50].

In line with the above, this study analyses how SEH influences RED. In addition, it assesses the mediating role of RED in the relationship between SEH and the SPA. These objectives are stated in the following hypotheses:

H2: *SEH positively influences RED.*

H4: *RED mediates the relationship between SEH and the SPA.*

Figure 1 shows a graphical representation of the theoretical model of this study and the associated hypotheses.

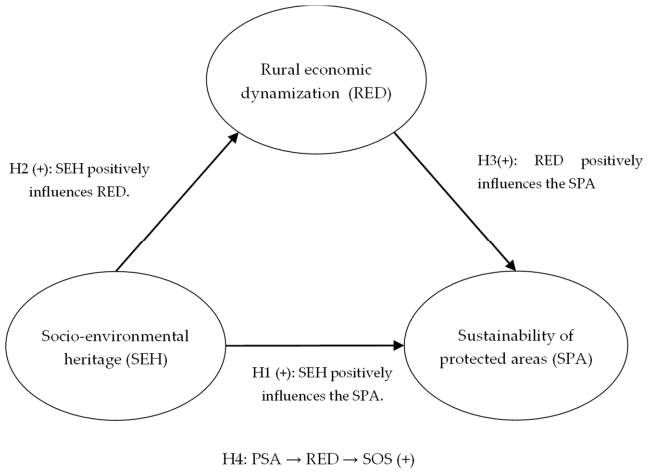


Figure 1. Theoretical model and research hypotheses; SEH, socio-environmental heritage; RED, rural economic dynamization; SPA, sustainability of protected areas.

Protected areas are fundamental to ensuring natural resources for future generations, especially common resources such as water, air, and biodiversity. In this regard, it is necessary to give greater relevance to these spaces within the system that integrates the triad of sustainable development (SD), including society, economy, and environment, with these spaces serving as an example of how to achieve the balance among these three components effectively [51].

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Design

The research strategy was associative, exploring the functional relationship among the three variables under analysis. The type of study is explanatory, where a mediation model was tested. Finally, latent variable design (LVD) or structural equation modeling (SEM) was used, consisting of two parts that make up the model as follows: one structural or inner model (the relationship among the constructs) and the other measurement or outer model (the relationship among the indicators and the constructs they measure). The statistical procedure to estimate the parameters of the SEM model was based on variances, also known as Partial Least Squares (PLS-SEM).

3.2. Working Unit

The working unit for this research was established as the Regional Protected Areas of Colombia, specifically the Regional Natural Park Serranía de las Quinchas (PNRSQ), as the unit of analysis. The buffer zone of the PNRSQ in the municipality of Otanche, Boyacá, established the population of the families that are part of the productive units of the zone of influence in the buffer zone of the PNRSQ in the municipality of Otanche, Boyacá Department, Colombia. The sample started from a selection based on the non-probabilistic method by establishing a relational element, that is, the families that are part of the productive units of the villages "Buenos Aires, Las Quinchas, Camilo, El Carmen, Altazor and San José de Nazareth", as these are the five buffer zones of the park in the municipality of Otanche, Boyacá, as shown in Figure 2, which also shows the location of the PNRSQ in the municipality of Otanche, Boyacá Department, Colombia.

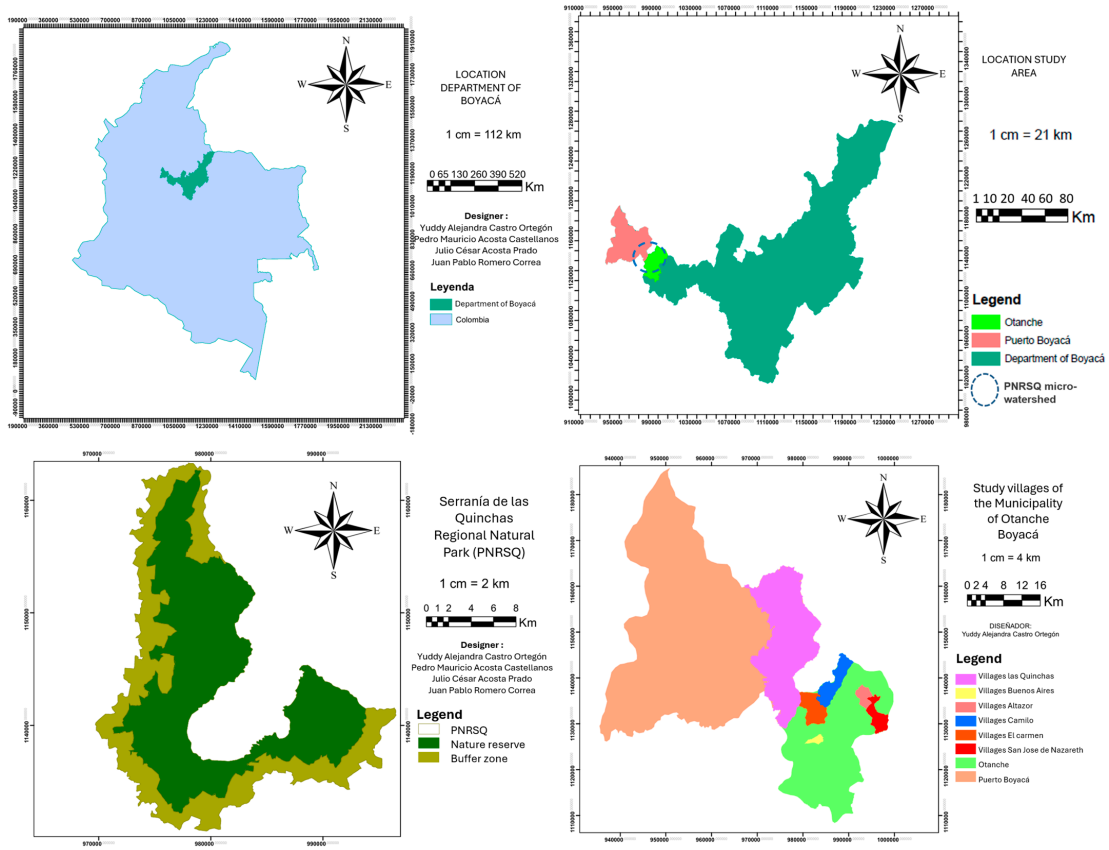


Figure 2. Location of the PNRSQ and villages [map]: scale 1:25,000. Boyacá. Source: authors' own elaboration with ArcGIS software 10.3.

3.3. Sample Size

Regarding sample size, Hair et al. [52] indicate that, as a simple guide, the rule of 10 cases per predictor can be used, where the minimum sample size for the analysis in PLS-SEM should be a value greater than that obtained by multiplying the number of path coefficients (arrows) directed to the dependent variable in the structural model by 10. In the present study, considering the first-order model, the minimum sample size would result from multiplying the path coefficients directed toward the sustainability of the PNRSQ buffer zone by 10. In this sense, there are eight route coefficients, four that start from socio-environmental heritage (dimensions), and the other four that start from rural economy dynamization (dimensions). Therefore, based on this procedure, the minimum sample size for the analysis in PLS-SEM is 80 (8×10), which allows us to validate the sample since a minimum of 150 cases is required, and this study was carried out with 172 cases.

However, as Cohen [53] argues for the determination of the minimum sample size, it is necessary to consider both statistical power and effect sizes. Thus, an a priori statistical power analysis was performed in the statistical program G* Power version 3.1.9.7 [54]. The input parameters for this analysis were a one-tailed test, an expected effect size R2 of 0.04 [55], a significance level of 5% ($\alpha = 0.05$), an expected statistical power of 0.80 (34), and a total of 8 predictors (4 dimensions of socio-environmental heritage and 4 dimensions of rural economy dynamization). The results indicated that at least 150 observations would be needed to reach a statistical power of 80% to detect R2 values of at least 0.04.

Therefore, the 172 cases collected for the present study and used in the PLS-SEM analysis are above the minimum sample size recommended from the a priori statistical power analysis and the rule of 10 cases per predictor. Also, the PLS-SEM approach can provide adequate information on model estimates with a sample size of 150 cases when path coefficients are high (e.g., greater than 0.80) [56].

Participants were selected through non-probability, intentional sampling (Kerlinger and Lee, 2000). The distribution of participants and roles was as follows: 16.3% academics/heads of educational institutions, 51.2% representatives of companies/cooperatives/producer associations, 16.3% social leaders, 12.8% local authorities/representatives of public institutions, and 3.5% representatives of NGOs/civil associations.

3.4. Instrument

All the study variables were measured through a measurement scale with satisfactory psychometric properties developed by Castro [57]. It measures a set of variables related to sustainability in regional natural parks. For this study, three of these variables were considered including socio-environmental heritage (measured through 12 items, from SEH–1 to SEH–12), rural economic dynamization (measured through 17 items, from RED–1 to RED–17), and the sustainability of protected areas (measured through 11 items, from SPA–1 to SPA–11). The items were on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree).

The instrument was developed using a sample of 172 cases between 2021 and 2022, and the variables associated with innovation in health organizations were selected from a systematic review. In the original scale, the three variables had high levels of internal consistency measured through the alpha coefficient [57]. In addition, it has valid evidence based on the internal structure, through exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis. This sequence of analyses indicates that the instrument meets the psychometric properties required for a measurement scale [58].

3.5. Procedure

The statistical analysis was carried out using structural equation modeling based on variances or partial least squares (PLS-SEM). This procedure was selected because this study's objective involves the influence on a target variable (the sustainability of protected areas in the PNRSQ buffer zone). These models are composed of two parts as follows: a measurement model and a structural model. The measurement model used was a reflective

one, where the indicators reflect the variables. In the structural model, socio-environmental heritage is treated as an exogenous variable, while the dynamization of the local economy and the sustainability of the protected area of the PNRSQ buffer zone are endogenous variables. All analyses were carried out using the SmartPLS 3.3.3 program [59].

Because the socio-environmental heritage and dynamization of the local economy variables had four dimensions each, higher-order models were used to test a structure containing two levels of variables. Specifically, a hierarchical reflective–reflective component model was used, where the first- and second-order relationships were reflective [60]. The specification of the higher-order variables was performed using the disjoint two-stage approach [61]. From this approach, scores were obtained for the lower-order components in the first stage, and in the second stage, these scores were used to measure the higher-order variables. The socio-environmental heritage variable was composed of the following dimensions: recreational activities, mental and physical health, tourism, aesthetic appreciation, and inspiration for culture, art, and design, as well as a spiritual experience and feeling of relevance. Meanwhile, the dynamization of the local economy variable was made up of the following dimensions: food, raw materials, freshwater, and medicinal resources.

The PLS-SEM results were assessed from the measurement and structural model [62]. For the measurement model, reliability was estimated through Cronbach's alpha coefficients (α), rho_A, and composite reliability (CF). On the other hand, convergent validity was assessed through external loadings and average variance extracted (AVE). Likewise, discriminant validity was assessed using the criterion of Fornell and Larcker [63] and the heterotrait–monotrait ratio (HTMT) proposed by Henseler, Ringle, and Sarstedt [64]. Finally, the structural model was assessed through the adjusted R2 (variance explained), f2 (effect size), Q2 predict (predictive performance), and the magnitude and statistical significance of the path coefficients.

As a complementary analysis to those usually reported when working with PLS-SEM, an importance–performance map analysis (IPMA) was performed at the level of latent variables and indicators [65]. This statistical procedure allows for identifying antecedent variables that have relevant importance in the influence of the target variable but, at the same time, low yields to propose improvements in them.

4. Results

4.1. Evaluation of the First- and Second-Order Models

Regarding discriminant validity, Fornell and Larcker's [64] criterion indicated that the square root of the AVE was higher than the correlations among the variables in most cases. Likewise, the HTMT ratio [64] showed values below 0.95, although SEH and RED were slightly higher than this value (0.959). The results of these two procedures meet the established criteria, which allows us to conclude that the second-order variables have discriminant validity [62], as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Discriminant validity of the second-order model.

Variable	SEH	RED	SPA
Socio-environmental heritage (SEH)	0.908	0.959	0.810
Rural economic dynamization (RED)	0.904	0.937	0.857
Sustainability of protected area (SPA)	0.756	0.808	0.803

4.2. Evaluation of the Structural Model

Table 2 presents the results of the structural model. Regarding the direct influence on the SPA of the PNRSQ buffer zone, RED indicates a higher path coefficient than SEH; this result is statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). Together, both variables explained 65.2% of the variability in the SPA of the PNRSQ buffer zone, as shown in Figure 3. The effect size was assessed according to Cohen's [66] criteria as small (f2 > 0.02), medium (f2 > 0.15), or

large (f2 > 0.35). The influence of RED on the SPA of the PNRSQ buffer zone was medium (f2 = 0.249).

Table 2. Evaluación del modelo estructural.

Hypothesis	Route Coefficient	t	95% IC BCa	F2	R2aju	Conclusion
H1: *SEH → SPA*	0.138	0.992	[−0.138; 0.399]	0.010		Not supported
H2: *SEH → RED*	0.904	27.747 ***	[0.818; 0.945]	4.453	0.816	Supported
H3: *RED → SPA*	0.683	4.810 ***	[0.416; 0.961]	0.249		Supported
H4: *SEH → RED → SPA*	0.618	4.695 ***	[0.378; 0.887]		0.652	Supported

Note: SEH = socio-environmental heritage, RED = rural economic dynamization, SPA = sustainability of the protected areas of the PNRSQ buffer zone, *t* = Student's *t*-test, 95% CI BCa = corrected and accelerated 95% confidence intervals derived from bootstrapping with 10,000 samples, f2 = effect size, R2aju = adjusted coefficient of determination. *** $p < 0.001$.

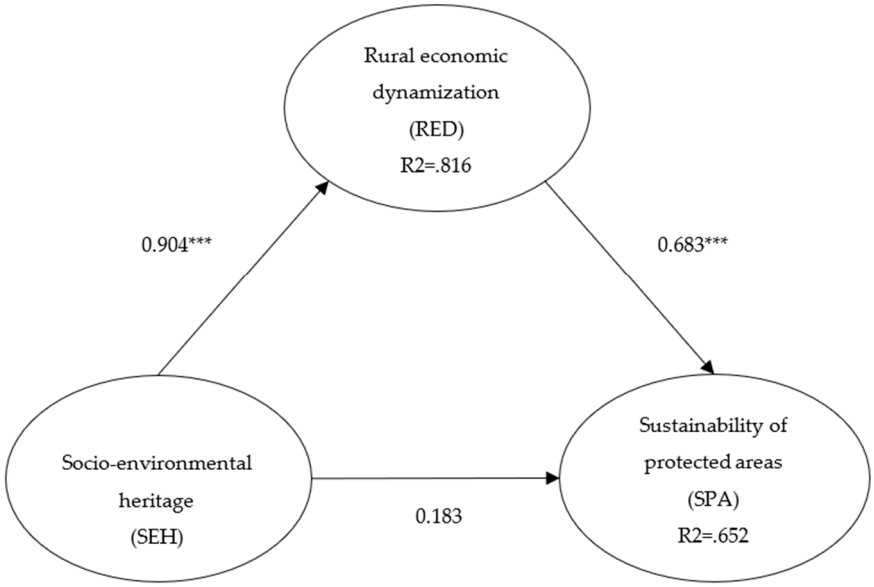


Figure 3. Evaluation of path coefficients and explained variance (R2). *** $p \leq 0.001$.

Regarding the indirect influence tested (H4), it was found that it was statistically significant ($t = 4.695$, $p < 0.001$), that is, RED mediates the influence of SEH on the SPA of the PNRSQ buffer zone. This mediation is of the complete type because the direct influence of SEH on the SPA of the PNRSQ buffer zone was not statistically significant and the indirect influence posed in hypothesis 4 obtained a statistically significant result [49]. Finally, predictive performance (Q2predict) was evaluated for both variables and indicators, and the values of 0.01, 0.25, and 0.50 indicate small, medium, and large model relevance, respectively [63]. At the variable level, the RED and SPA of the PNRSQ buffer zone presented a large relevance. At the indicator level, the dimensions of RED indicated a large relevance. In contrast, the relevance of the dimensions of the SPA of the PNRSQ buffer zone was small and medium. This allowed us to validate the structural model based on the mediating effect and the relationship among the proposed variables, as shown in the evaluation of path coefficients and explained variance (R2) in Figure 3.

4.3. Importance–Performance Map Analysis (IPMA)

The following two terms were relevant in this analysis: importance and performance. The total effects are equivalent to the level of importance of variables and indicators at the time of explaining the variable of interest, which, in this study, is the "variable level of the SPA of the PNRSQ buffer zone". On the other hand, the mean scores of the variables and indicators represent their achieved performances [67]. According to the

results obtained, at the level of variables, the equity partner presents a higher performance and importance in predicting the SPA of the PNRSQ buffer zone. A level of indicators, the aesthetic appreciation and inspiration for culture, art, and design variable shows a greater importance in the explanation of the SPA of the PNRSQ buffer zone. This dimension results in the indicator considering improvement actions because it presents relevant importance in predicting the SPA of the PNRSQ buffer zone and has a lower performance than the other indicators listed in Table 3.

Table 3. Importance–performance mapping analysis (IPMA) and predictive performance.

Variable	Importance	Performance	Q2predict
Socio-environmental heritage (SEH)	0.756	78.522	
Recreational activities, mental and physical health	0.194	78.155	
Tourism	0.202	79.412	
Aesthetic appreciation and inspiration for culture, art, and design	0.220	77.399	
Spiritual experience and sense of relevance	0.215	79.168	
Rural economic dynamization (RED)	0.683	75.418	0.825
Food	0.178	75.877	0.720
Raw materials	0.182	74.781	0.710
Freshwater	0.180	78.338	0.662
Medicinal resources	0.188	72.805	0.749
Sustainability of protected areas (SPA)			0.575
SPA_1			0.452
SPA_2			0.199
SPA_3			0.400
SPA_4			0.312
SPA_5			0.484
SPA_6			0.372
SPA_10			0.252
SPA_11			0.378

5. Discussion

Regarding the first SEH variable, this empirical study showed the value that the community gives to SEH as a strategic component that allows for RED of the protected area, since it is taken as the only source of ecosystem services, where SEH is a strategic factor between the balance of conservation and use of natural resources. For the RED variable, the inhabitants considered that this variable allows for guaranteeing, activating, and strengthening the economic processes of the PNRSQ buffer zone. The SPA variable showed that most of the respondents considered that being in a conservation area allows them to promote economic development based on the natural spaces it offers. They also considered that one of the alternatives that promote sustainable development is environmental education and the inclusion of the community in sustainable productive activities.

These aspects are supported by the statistical analysis carried out in PLS, where it was established that the direct influence on the SPA of the PNRSQ buffer zone and RED indicates a higher path coefficient than SEH. This result was statistically significant and allowed for establishing how an endogenous variable or dependent variable (SPA) receives the influence of another variable, in this case, the exogenous variable or independent variable (SEH). This demonstrated the direct influence exerted by the independent variable on the dependent variable and the influence on the SPA, thus testing the following established hypothesis: RED mediates the influence of SEH on the SPA of the PNRSQ buffer zone [63].

In this sense, SEH is understood as a set of cultural and environmental assets based on ecosystem goods and services that bring meaning to a territory and are shared by the community, giving meaning to the surrounding environment [18]. These shared meanings acquire a dynamic and changing character because they are subject to constant negotiation, explicit or implicit, among different social agents. Essential to this definition of SEH is the rejection of modernization, as well as a defense of heterogeneity and multiplicity. It

is therefore difficult to speak of SHE in an abstract sense [16,18]. On the other hand, it should be possible to identify some common characteristics that would allow us to identify and facilitate the path towards SPA. These characteristics could involve, for example, the notion that the natural heritage of rural areas is very valuable and should be protected, and also the notion that any conservation policy must understand and share the dynamic and changing nature of human society, particularly, of rural society, which is largely responsible for the environment that it now seeks to be conserved [68].

However, sustainability emerges in rural areas from public policies or RED programs with a strong focus on social innovation, thus offering new employment opportunities. This implies developing and transferring policies from the public to the private sector with the participation of the community and the main stakeholders based on the efficient use and management of ecosystem goods and services. This recent transformation not only leads to the formation of new social, economic, and environmental groups and their self-organization but also enables the adaptation to changing conditions of new and innovative rural development governance systems [69].

6. Conclusions

The results made it possible to establish that there is a positive effect on the mediation of RED between the SEH and SPA of the PNRSQ buffer zone. In addition, it was possible to recognize that there is a positive relationship between SEH and RED by recognizing ecosystem services and their appropriation as the SEH of the communities. A favorable effect was achieved in the configuration of RED processes, as well as in the generation of SPA systems.

Likewise, there is a need to strengthen the recognition and use of ecosystem services, from SEH as an enclave for RED. These elements should be seen as a whole and not separately, given that the economic and development processes of the territories ultimately shape aspects of the SEH of these communities. This allows for defining the relationship between people and their environment while promoting key aspects for the generation of sustainability elements such as social inclusion, economic growth, and environmental balance.

Finally, the need to design educational strategies that lead to the understanding of SEH and its contribution to sustainable development processes was identified. This would facilitate the promotion of human and integral development from economic, social, and environmental perspectives to educate the community on the understanding and recognition of the environment based on the following two essential elements: human actions and natural phenomena. In this way, it is possible to promote the generation of RED strategies based on the SEH of territories and their appropriation by communities.

For future research, it is important to strengthen the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of sustainable development to generate integrative spaces where the activities of social actors can be broadly identified. Furthermore, it is necessary to achieve greater commitment on the part of government entities in multidimensional revitalization projects, such as the one exposed in this study, to achieve greater coverage in the quality of life of the population residing in the buffer zone of the protected area.

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