How to Integrate Social Innovation in the Tunisian Research and Innovation Policy

Refaat Chaabouni
Professor Emeritus, University of Tunis El-Manar
Assessment of Tunisian STI policy

- These policies had a positive impact on the production of knowledge but failed in its diffusion and use by the production sector to foster innovation.
- They were characterized by a centralized to down-approach and paid very little attention to social challenges.
30515 Tunisian publications in the Web of Science
Growth and competitiveness indicators

**Figure 11.1:** Real Per Capita Growth Rate 1990-2010

Source: World Development Indicators (WDI); authors’ calculations.
Note: MENA refers to non-oil-rich MENA countries. Growth rates in graph have been smoothed with HP filter.
Growth and competitiveness indicators (2000-2010)

Figure 11.9: Value Added in Tunisia by Export Sector

Source: WITS Comtrade; authors’ calculations
From the NIS framework perspective:

- The main elements of a NIS exist but they are evolving more or less independently: Knowledge flow and interactions between the sub-systems are very weak.
- Public policy and governance are fragmented and spread over different ministries with very little attention to social challenges.
- The business sector is poorly engaged in innovation efforts (weak absorptive capacity, passive learners).

For a recent assessment of the Tunisian NIS see: ‘ESCWA Study: How to Harness the NIS in Tunisia’, M. Khanfir, Feb. 2016
At least three main challenges should be faced

- The adoption of the NIS paradigm for the formulation of STI policies and the related instruments to ensure knowledge flows and systemic efficiency

- A shift from a centralized top-down innovation policy to a bottom-up regional innovation policy

- The integration of social innovation as a full component of the Tunisian STI policies

These three issues are strongly interdependent!
Social innovation

- In 2000 the OECD created a multi-stakeholder Forum: “The Forum on Social Innovation (FSI)”

- Two important workshops led by RISTEX (Japan) in 2009

- Since that time many other initiatives have been launched at national and international levels
Social innovation

Rationales and opportunities to foster innovation to address social challenges

- Increased disconnection between economic growth and social welfare:
  
  Growth does not automatically lead to social welfare anymore

- The purpose of social innovation is to mobilize STI not solely for generating economic benefits, but for anticipating and responding to societal needs

- Social challenges have a strong mobilizing effect, which would allow gathering of competences and resources, beyond sectors and disciplines
Social innovation

- “Social innovation can be defined as the development and implementation of new ideas (products, services and models) to meet social needs and create new social relationships or collaborations. They are innovations that are not only good for society but also enhance individuals’ capacity to act” (EU2013)

- “There is social innovation wherever new mechanisms and norms consolidate and improve the well being of individuals, communities and territories in terms of social inclusion, creation of employment, quality of life” (OECD, 2011)

Key principle: social well being is a goal not a consequence

A clear link between Social innovation and local development
Social innovation

Main Characteristics of Social innovations

- Social innovations are multidisciplinary, thus dialogue between the natural sciences and the social sciences is fundamental in this process.

- Social innovations involve multilateral collaboration among different stakeholders.

- Social innovations involve new actors in the innovation scene (social entrepreneurs and enterprises, NGO, private foundations...).

- Social challenges have a public-good nature but can lead to new business opportunities.
Strategic importance of SI for Tunisia

Considering the current situation of Tunisia, social innovation has at least three main benefits:

- it will create a culture of active citizenship and community participation that enhances democracy and gets citizens involved in co-creating solutions

- it will foster innovative partnerships between government, the civic sector and business to find solutions for key issues such as youth unemployment, regional disparities, and the fight against terrorism

- it will stimulate the flow of knowledge and interactions between the multiple components of the NIS which will enhance opportunities for innovation across the country
Societal challenges

**Figure 11.2: Evolution of Unemployment by Level of Education**

- Unemployment with University degree
- Unemployment with primary and less
- Unemployment with secondary
- GDP Per capita (right axis)
- Output per worker (right axis)

![Graph showing unemployment rate and GDP per capita](image)

Source: INS; authors’ calculations

Note: A change in the definition of unemployment was introduced in 2008 to align Tunisia to the ILO definition and resulted in a reduction of approximately 1.5 percentage points in the level of unemployment.
Societal challenges

Figure 11.3: Large Regional Disparities Persist in Tunisia

Poverty headcount in 2010 by region

Source: INS and World Bank (2012).
How to implement Social Innovation in the Tunisian STI Policy?

A complex and challenging objective

The development and diffusion of social innovation faces traditional and well established frontiers between disciplines, sectors, as well as jurisdictional boundaries in government and administrations!
Linking Social Innovation to Regional Innovation Strategy

As the regional level is close to the local economy and social tissue, with its place-based particularities, it is a good level to start to tackle the social needs and to create blended value. From regional innovation strategy side, the integration of Social Innovation allows the enrolment of a broader range of stakeholders, including citizens in the regional design process.
The quadruple helix model

**Business**
- Manufacturing and services
- Primary sectors
- Financial sector
- Creative industries
- Social sector
- Large firms
- SMEs
- Young entrepreneurs
- Students with business ideas
- Cluster and business organisations

**Research**
- Public and private research bodies
- Universities
- Science and technology parks
- NCPs
- Technology transfer offices
- Horizon2020 committee members
- Regional ESFRI roadmaps

**Entrepreneurial in composition and spirit:** (risk-taking, broader view beyond boundaries, ...)

**Public administration**
- Different departments
- If relevant at different government levels
- Agencies e.g. for regional development
- Business advice
- Public procurement offices
- Incubators

**Civil society / Users**
- NGOs and citizens’ initiatives
- Related to societal challenges
- For which innovative solutions would be helpful
- Consumers associations
- Talents! etc.
Regional Smart Specialisation

- Defines regional innovation strategies on the basis of existing strengths and potential for excellence, differentiating and profiling a region globally, applying a broad view to innovation and fostering cross-sectoral approaches.
- Uses innovation as driver for structural change and economic transformation.
- Creates a shared vision, commitment and co-responsibility across innovation actors in regional eco-systems.
- Works across administrative and departmental boundaries, engaging stakeholders in an entrepreneurial discovery process for the definition of priorities for public policy.
Steps to RIS3

- Step 1: Analysis of regional potential for innovation-driven differentiation
- Step 2: RIS 3 design and governance – ensuring participation & ownership
- Step 3: Elaboration of an overall vision for the future of the region
- Step 4: Selection of priorities for RIS3 + definition of objectives
- Step 5: Definition of coherent policy mix, roadmaps and action plan
- Step 6: Integration of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms
Concluding Remark:

‘Social Innovation becomes an imperative when problems are getting worse or when institutions reflect past rather than present problems’!