



Reinforcing the Innovation-Employability Nexus in the Mediterranean

Digital Steering Committee Meetings *

5 and 19 May 2020

Minutes

19 May (Session 2)

Itaf Ben Abdallah, Senior Advisor on Higher Education and Research at UfM, opened the meeting by stating that the purpose of the initiative was to bring new ideas to companies, increase the flow of communication and strengthen the innovation environment. Universities and research institutions must support students and researchers in understanding the realities of business. The topic of the meeting was on existing initiatives and how to create new partnerships in the Mediterranean with a special focus on promoting entrepreneurship and digital innovation.

She emphasised that it is essential to think about actions or strategies that can be implemented by universities and researchers to increase their partnerships with business centres, especially as we shift to a new normality of new types of jobs. Tele-working and IT will expand all over the world.

Digitalisation is a way to increase resilience in our economy and innovation will become the trend in sustainable economic development.

Johannes Laepple, Project Manager at GIZ, highlighted the GIZ support to the initiative as it deals with how to ensure that young graduates are equipped with the tools and skills that prepare them for the job market; and how to be sure that they become valuable contributors to the economy.

This is important in the Southern Mediterranean due to: Experiencing the highest level of unemployment among higher education graduates in the world, at 25% (UNDP), the impossibility of absorbing all graduates to an inflated civil service, and the necessity for young graduates to participate in the economy.

Youth unemployment is a shared responsibility of Governments, universities, and businesses, and can only be resolved with a joint effort from policy makers, higher education institutions (HEI) and the private sector.



An example is business incubators or accelerators that provide support services to students, graduates and young entrepreneurs in early stages of setting up a business. Evidence shows that this support results in a higher survival rate and creates more jobs. These types of businesses do not need many public resources, and many are virtual so do not need physical space.

Giuseppe Provenzano, Expert at UfM, introduced background of the project, summarized the first meeting on 5 May 2020 on employability and digitalisation, and introduced the topics of current session and agenda. Session II focuses on how to promote entrepreneurship and startup creation, especially how research centres can connect more with businesses.

Alberto Soraci, Area Science Park, gave an introductory presentation titled “From Research to Business”. He presented the results of 5TOI_4EWAS, which mapped all Med countries, with the aim to build a structured ecosystem of private companies and public operators capable of generating economic development at various regional, national and international level. Mobility of staff and students and the identification of good practices are main factors supporting interactions among researchers and innovation actors.

These interaction face challenges such as lack of platforms to link with researchers, or the lack of management capacity to handle innovation, and even cultural aspects.

The solutions can be to train people to transfer innovation, knowledge, financing support or streamline administrative support.

How to promote entrepreneurship and start-up creation in Research and Innovation

Arafah Dia-Eddin, Co-chair of the UfM RP on R&I, informed that Jordan Higher Council for Science and Technology has two major roles: leadership (of policies and national strategies) and coordination (of partnerships and networking between HEIs and Industry).

Entrepreneurship is an important part of the innovation eco-system. This faces several challenges: involving more educational institutions focusing on research and development, as well innovation. The lack of access to finance is one of the bigger challenges start-up face in the



eco-system. The centre supports reactivating business incubators and initiating and establishing innovation and entrepreneurship centres in order to further contribute to preparing startups.

Ingrid Schwaiger, Deputy Head of Unit, Neighbourhood South Programmes, EC DG NEAR, presented the EU approach to startups and entrepreneurship in the Southern Neighbourhood, as a key component of economic cooperation.

It has been highlighted that it's primordial to focus on the private sector and on job creation, in particular for young people and women. SME development, inclusive growth and access to finance.

A regional flagship programme on innovation and startup called "The Next Society" has the aim of promoting innovation ecosystems by creating a large network of Euromed innovation stakeholders, mobilizing ecosystems to cooperate and improve national frameworks, supporting and accelerating MED innovators in developing answers to the region's challenges: access to resources, food dependency, technology and now COVID-19.

It is important to mention that cooperation between private and public sector is often very limited, in particular when it comes to bringing research to market. Clusters need to be strengthened to enable them to play a more important role as catalysts for innovation. Other projects mentioned included SwitchMed, Med-Up!, Safir, and CREAT4MED.

Biljana Radonjic Ker Lindsay, Associate Director, Employment and Skills in the Gender and Economic

Inclusion, at the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development presented EBRD as an international financial institution that invests across Europe and East and South Mediterranean. Entrepreneurship is important, as engagement is limited between higher education institutions (HEI) and the private sector. Higher Education Institutions remain supply driven. There is a mismatch between graduates and skills required by labour market.

There is a need for a policy dialogue to facilitate alignment between HEIs and business needs, to setup skills counsels by businesses aiming to upgrade HEIs structures to provide necessary skills for graduates.

It is important to always make sure to bring the private sector and government together in policy engagement. EBERD is open to cooperating with HEIs in the region to bridge the gap between business and education.



Olfa Zeribi, Tunisian Ministry of Education and Research, National focal point for UfM RP on R&I, described Tunisian approach to support collaboration with research centres through some initiatives such as: Developing employability, Career and skills certification centres “4c”; Industrial doctorates: mobility for young researchers (MOBIDOC); startup creation; and connection between universities, research centres-private sector.

The Startup Act facilitates the launch and development of startups from Tunisia. This legal framework incorporates 20 measures structured around Merit and Benefits label for entrepreneurs, investors and startups.

Marilena Rossano, CNR – Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche, National focal point for UfM RP on R&I.

National Research Council of Italy (CNR) aims to foster innovation and competitiveness of the national research system through young researchers and involving personnel from both universities and private firms. One of the main initiatives mentioned is the industrial research doctorates, aimed at enhancing entrepreneurship and increasing human capacity building.

Lessons learnt include technology innovation, jobs improvement, territorial clusters and rewarding excellence. Challenges include some missing incentives, more internationalization, more initiatives to bridge the gap with the private sector. Moreover, intersectoral exposure and interdisciplinary research options are important as socio-economic growth occurs when private industry participates and PhD students receive specific training.

Raffaello Trapasso, OECD, Higher Education Initiative, presented HEInnovate as a holistic framework reflecting that HEI are not necessarily designed to deliver services required by industry.

HEInnovate entrepreneurial-innovation agenda is based on an online self-assessment tool; a Country Reports - Supporting Entrepreneurship and Innovation in HEI and a Policy learning network. OECD has developed a framework with 8 dimensions (numbers 4 and 6 particularly relevant): Leadership and governance; Organisational capacity - funding, people and incentives; Entrepreneurial teaching and learning; Preparing and support entrepreneurs; Digital transformation and capability; Knowledge exchange and collaboration; Internationalised institution; Measuring impact.



HEInnovate tools are open to all HEI and has been used by more than 200. HEIs can benchmark their innovation capability.

Marco Cunetto, International Cooperation Manager, BUSINESSMED, described the role of SMEs in stimulating entrepreneurship as key.

Market demands need to be turned into commercial targets in order to encourage investment in research. There is a lack of support in the go-to-market process. In addition to turn research into marketable products, there will be a need to intervene for both top-down and bottom-up actions. These challenges can be overcome by the concept of “inter-partnership”. Finally, regional cooperation is key to move away from the “silo” approach.

Fabrizio Porrino, Senior Vice-President, at FacilityLive, presented Startup Europe Mediterranean (SEMED). SEMED (semed.eu) is collection of innovation ecosystems in the Mediterranean with a platform for startups, investors and innovators.

Silo management in policy makes it difficult even within an organisation to know what is going on in another silo. SEMED helps by:

- Providing visibility via search mechanism in their online platform;
- Leveraging connections to share, be open, provide support to others;
- Matching, exchanging information digitally;
- Highlighting funding opportunities, fiscal benefits, macro trends; and
- Providing resources - manuals, reports, video, analysis, white papers, news, events, best practices.

Hannes Leo, CEO of Cbased/Discuto, Expert from the Horizon 2020 Policy support facility in Tunisia presented the study aimed at defining research priorities and promoting private participation in R&D.

Tunisia has been active in start-ups since the 1990s with many private actors, increasing international presence and Government support. It is one of the most dynamic location in Africa for entrepreneurship, nevertheless 70% entrepreneurs are male, aged 20-44, and only 3% have tertiary education. Areas for improvement include: Streamlining measures and framework conditions; Adapting best practice approaches; Changing incentives for academics (no incentive to work with industry); and Create ecosystem networking agency to promote interaction, flow of info, communities of practice.



Núria Jové, Head of Projects, at Association of Public Catalan Universities, presented CTI, a Knowledge, territory and innovation platform which promotes social progress economic competitiveness and cultural vitality in Catalonia through cooperation between universities, companies, public administration, and civil society organisations (4 helix). It aims to advance a knowledge-based economy; foster human capital and stimulate social innovation and entrepreneurship. Among its outcomes, an Agenda for innovation and competitiveness, a MOOC “How to set-up a business?”, and collaboration in the Industrial Doctorate Plan of the Government of Catalonia and promotion of the higher education apprenticeships with enterprises.

Naouel Abdellatif Mami, Vice Rector, University of Setif 2, Algeria, part of UNIMED SubNetwork on Employability, informed about how Algeria is engaged in a major HEI development programme with more than 1.5 million students across 171 universities.

University-business collaborations need improvement: Work-study builds trust; Business research - roles and responsibilities; and on professionalisation of teaching.

Actions to improve may include: Developing business incubators; Creating information society and Greater cooperation between business and technology centres. HEI actions can help through national and international networks in HEI such as UNIMED.

Tour de Table

A statement was read for **Dr. Aravella Zachariou**, Chair of UNECE Steering Committee on Education for Sustainable Development, Cyprus Ministry of Education and Culture. The RI-EN initiative can be valuable also for regional initiatives and economic mechanisms. Especially in the post-pandemic era and the new challenges that the national economies are facing, employability and innovation are becoming critical, as is the role of higher education. In particular, examining innovation and employability in the lens of sustainability can be a new path to overcome the crisis on a social, economic, environmental, and political level. The UNECE Steering Committee, has a mechanism in process for integrating education for sustainable development in all levels of formal, non-formal and informal education including higher education, and collaborating for the next decade 2021 to 2030 in new strategic planning for education for sustainable development. Innovation and employability is one of our core strands.



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Marco Marcelli, Laboratory of Experimental Oceanology and Marine Ecology, University of Tuscia, presented as relevant to the meeting the experience of the UfM-labelled project BlueSkills, which valorises research for more sustainable Mediterranean Sea. Its beneficiaries come from Academia, Business, and Government and it is promoted by OGS National Institute of Oceanography and Applied Geophysics, an Italian public research institution Partnerships with 11 universities in North Africa, Spain, France and Portugal.

Armela Dino, Science Policy analyst, Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation, introduced a policy paper at EU level that will be available 31 May 2020: Speak Africa Taskforce Strategic Report. It mentions youth perspective, shaping of doctoral schools, enabling of knowledge triangle, capacity building, closing the gender gap and massive online capacity building schemes. Many examples of collaborations between universities and private sectors were mentioned such as Talentum Telefonica, Iberdrola and Women Explorer Award.

Noha Fathi, HOMERe, shared the view that entrepreneurs need access to valid information about whether a project is viable for market, as this drives decision to proceed or not on the project. It should be encouraged peer exchange programme internationally, and traveling and meeting with peer companies - e.g. ERASMUS for businesses.

Antoine Weexsteen, Africa Middle East Project Manager at the French Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, gave an overview of CIFRE Industrial Research Training Conventions in France. A tool to link universities and researchers with companies to stimulate interest in doctorate Employment and allows student to do thesis within a company. To date, it boasts 25.000 students, 8.000 companies, and 4.000 labs.

This initiative could expanded beyond France, as already has with Morocco.

Additionally, the French Development Agency supports initiatives on higher education and companies in research and innovation ecosystem, such as within the context of the Summit of the Two Shores.



Giuseppe Provenzano concluded the session of the UfM RI-EN Steering Committee, informing how this has deepened the entrepreneur aspects for the publication and trainings.

The youth in the Mediterranean is an under-utilised resource, given the high percentage of people under 30 while it is the most well-educated generation in its history. Thus, it can be a driver for growth if empowered. Connecting all the initiatives can increase our resilience in the region, as in the case of HEIs with companies and Innovation centres.

List of participants

19 May (Session 2)

NAME	ORGANIZATION	POSITION
Alsadag H E ALSADAG	Aljufra University, Lybia	Head of French Department
Alberto SORACI	Area Science Park	
Núria JOVÉ	Associació Catalana d'Universitats Públiques (ACUP) and Global University Network for Innovation (GUNi)	Head of projects
Marco CUNETTO	BUSINESSMED	International Cooperation Manager
Yasmine SEGHIRATE EL GUERRAB	CIHEAM	Policy and communications manager
BILJANA RADONJIC KER-LINDSAY	EBRD	Associate Director, Employment and Skills in the Gender and Economic Inclusion
Ingrid SCHWAIGER	European Commission	Deputy Head of Unit, DG Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (NEAR)
Jacopo BORDIGNON	European Commission	Policy Officer, DG Research & Innovation - Directorate International Cooperation
Eva BALTAR	European Commission	Policy Analyst, Joint Research Centre Intellectual Property and Technology Transfer
Fabrizio PORRINO	FacilityLive	SVP Global Public Affairs
Fabio ROTONDI	FacilityLive	
Antoine WEEXSTEEN	France - Ministry for Higher Education, Research, and Innovation	
Johannes LAEPPEL	GIZ	Expert



Alicia FIGUEROA	GIZ	Expert
Andreas GARBADE	GIZ	Expert / Technical Advisor
Manuel VALIENTE ALMAGRO	H2020	
Noha FATHI	HOMERe	Responsible for Entrepreneurship Actions
Léo VINCENT	HOMERe France	
Hannes LEO	Horizon 2020 - Cbased/Discuto	Policy Support Facility on Tunisia
Agustí FONTS	IRTA	Coordinator of Valorization and Strategic Projects
Basel QANDEEL	Islamic University of Gaza, Palestine	Director of Business and Technology Incubator
Marilena ROSSANO	Italy - National Research Centre (CNR)	Office for European and International Relations, Naples Branch,
Marco MARCELLI	Italy - University of Tuscia	Professor. Responsible of the Laboratory of Experimental Oceanology and Marine Ecology,
Dia-Eddin ARAFAH	Jordan - Higher Council for Science & Technology	Secretary General
Rasha SMADI	Jordan - Higher Council for Science & Technology	Acting Director for International Cooperation
Raffaele TRAPASSO	OECD	Project Leader
Jorge GÁLVEZ MÉNDEZ	OECD	Economist/Policy Analyst - Middle East and Africa Global Relations
Eleyan DIRAR	Palestine Technical Uni. Kadoorie	President Assistant
Armela DINO	Spain - Ministry of Science and Innovation,	Science Policy Analyst - Unit of Internationalisation of Science & Innovation
Olfa Zeribi BEN SLIMANE	Tunisia - Management Unit of the EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation Horizon 2020	Director General
Nina VOLLES	UfM Consultancy	Consultant
Carol SWITZER	UfM Consultancy	Support Consultant
Itaf BEN ABDALLAH	UfM Secretariat	Senior adviser for Higher Education and Research
Joao LOBO	UfM Secretariat	Project Analyst, Higher Education and Research
Giuseppe PROVENZANO	UfM Secretariat	Expert, Higher Education and Research
Laura M GONZÁLEZ- LASO	UfM Secretariat	Professional Assistant, Higher Education and Research



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Silvia MARCHIONNE	UNIMED	Project Manager
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Camille DE GARIDEL THORON	Université AIX MARSEILLE	Director of the Mediterranean cooperation & Tethys network – International Relations Office
Mauve CARBONELL	Université AIX MARSEILLE	Professor, Tethys consortium (network of Med. Universities) president
Amel HAMROUNI	Université de Sousse, Tunisia	Professor at the faculty of Business and Management
Mohammed ASHRAF BANY	University of Jordan	Director of Innovation and Entrepreneurship Center
Naouel ABDELLATIF MAMI	University of Sétif 2, Algeria	Vice Rector in charge of External Relations and Cooperation