

The dynamics of social entrepreneurship in Tunisia after the Revolution of January 14, 2011: the elements of the concept, the elements of the context and the elements of implementation

Summary:

Social entrepreneurship has emerged since the 1980s in both the United States and Europe to address the social, ecological and environmental problems that have destabilized existing economic systems around the world. Since the end of the 1990s, scientific production has been proliferating on this subject, but there is no consensus and a unifying paradigm as to the definition of the concept. This is due to the distinctions in the conception and practice of social entrepreneurship in different contexts, especially in Europe and the United States. Reflecting and practicing social entrepreneurship thus remains subject to the specificities of the geographical context.

This work is in line with this perspective, as we seek to understand the characteristics of social entrepreneurship in Tunisia by positioning ourselves in relation to three components; the elements of context, the elements of concept and the elements of implementation.

This work is exploratory and we adopt a qualitative approach through semi-directive interviews addressed to the actors of the Tunisian ecosystem as well as to social enterprises belonging to several sectors.

Key words: social entrepreneurship, social entrepreneur, social enterprise, the elements: of the concept, of the context and of implementation

Introduction

Developments in progress since the late 1970s, linked to the globalization of economies have contributed to destabilizing existing economic systems, creating socio-economic, ecological and environmental problems, particularly in emerging and developing countries. The increase in disparities between nations, the depletion of natural resources, the emergence of problems linked to poverty, unemployment and social exclusion are all phenomena that have developed with the increasing pace of change brought about by the internationalization of economic activities.

Confronted with these deep changes, social entrepreneurship has emerged with the aim of boosting economic growth. Social entrepreneurship has expanded considerably since the 1980s in the United States and Europe (Kerlin, 2006; Defourny and Nyssens 2010) and has shown undeniable development potential that addresses, often successfully, social and environmental issues that public or private actors have failed to address (Urbano et al., 2017). Since the end of the 1990s, scientific production on this subject has been proliferating, reflecting the growing interest of researchers and academics (Short and al, 2009; Huybrechts and al, 2012; Sassmannshausen and Volkmann, 2018) in this phenomenon, which has always existed everywhere (Bacq and Jenssen, 2011).

A literature review reveals several observations, one of the major points of which is the lack of consensus and a unifying paradigm regarding the definition of the concept (Bacq and Jenssen, 2011). This can be explained by the differences in the conception and practice of social entrepreneurship in different contexts, particularly in Eastern Europe and the United States; reflecting and practicing social entrepreneurship therefore remains subject to the specificities of the geographic context. That said, each context represents specificities that are reflected in the definition of the concept and in its application.

The interest of research dealing with the comparison of conceptions of social entrepreneurship in different geographical contexts is justified by the fact that these studies reveal the

specificities of each region or country (economic, social, political, cultural, demographic, etc.), which highlights the differences, of course, but above all the learning that each context can bring to the concept of social entrepreneurship in terms of scientific innovations.

This work is part of this perspective, as we seek to understand the characteristics of social entrepreneurship in Tunisia, a country where we are witnessing on the one hand the emergence of the phenomenon, and on the other hand the absence of scientific research studying this aspect.

By positioning ourselves in relation to three components; the elements of context, the elements of the concept and the elements of implementation; we seek to identify the specificities and characteristics of social entrepreneurship in Tunisia based on the different perceptions of the actors and social enterprises that are developing increasingly in this country.

We will first conduct a theoretical study that evokes a literature review on the phenomenon of social entrepreneurship based on a three-fold approach.

The first part will present elements related to the macroeconomic, political, institutional, cultural and socio-economic context of social entrepreneurship in Europe and the United States. The second part will present the elements related to the concepts of social entrepreneurship, social economy, social enterprise and social entrepreneur, their uses and their specificities.

The third part will deal with the elements of implementation that can help or hinder the development of social entrepreneurship in a specific context.

Secondly, we will approach our empirical study by following the same approach we established in the theoretical part (based on three components) in order to explore the dynamics and specificities of social entrepreneurship in Tunisia according to a characterization grid.

1. Elements of the Social Entrepreneurship Context: Emergence Context

Social entrepreneurship first appeared in Italy at the end of the 1980s by creating a specific status of social cooperatives to meet needs not or poorly met by government services. This phenomenon began to spread to the United States and the rest of Europe from the second half of the 1990s.

Thus, it was in the United States and Europe that social entrepreneurship research received the greatest impetus and was the most advanced. However, they developed in parallel but without any real interaction between the two regions (Defourny and Nyssens, 2010), partly because of the different conceptions of the role of capitalism and government (Bacq and Janssen, 2011).

In the following sections, we discuss the two main models of thought that have occupied the interest of the literature on social entrepreneurship today, namely the American model and the European model.

1.1. Social Entrepreneurship: The American Model

Social entrepreneurship emerged in the United States during the 1980s as a result of the economic downturn in the country, which resulted in reduced government funding for social sectors such as health, education, arts and environment.

This has forced not-for-profit organizations to transform themselves into social enterprises, creating income-generating business activities to compensate for the lack of funds and maintain the social mission.

However, the real development of the concept began with ‘the social enterprise’ initiative launched by Harvard Business School in 1993 and the implementation of training and support programs for social entrepreneurship by other major universities, namely Berkeley, Columbia and Stanford through the Center for Social Innovation that it created or foundations such as the Ashoka organization that was founded in 1981 by Bill Drayton, have also contributed to its development, first in the United States and later in the rest of the world (Defoumy and Nyssens, 2010; Rawhouser and al., 2019).

1.2. Social entrepreneurship: the European model

Social entrepreneurship in Europe has its origins in the third sector, or the social economy, a sector that emerged following the economic crisis in most European countries that occurred between the late 1970s and the 1990s. This situation was marked by a transformation of the welfare state which manifested itself in the disengagement of several industrialized states from the social sectors. This context was suitable for a gradual evolution of a third sector composed of organizations that belonged neither to the public nor the classic private sector and whose purpose was to respond to the new socio-economic changes by moving towards the satisfaction of social needs not solicited by the market and the State, such as essentially unemployment.

According to Defourny and Mertens (2008), there are three significant events that have given a real impetus to the emergence of social enterprises in Europe. Firstly, at the institutional level, the main impetus started in Italy in 1991, where the parliament passed a law granting a specific status of "social co-operative" to organizations carrying out economic activities in favour of social objectives.

Subsequently, a European network of researchers, called EMES¹, was formed in response to the success of the Italian legal invention with the aim of ensuring the development and emergence of social enterprises in Europe. This network covered all fifteen countries forming the European Union and sought to develop a common approach to social enterprise.

The third event was the launch in 2002 of the 'Coalition for Social Enterprise' initiative by Tony Blair's government in the UK to raise awareness of the importance of social enterprises and to promote their development. These events served as a starting point for mapping out the boundaries of the definition of social enterprise.

2. The Elements of the Concept of Social Entrepreneurship: Definition and Understanding of the Concept

There are several definitions of social entrepreneurship in the literature, but none of them is unanimously accepted (Bacq and Janssen, 2008; Brouard and Larivet, 2009; Roy et al., 2016).

However, there is some consensus on the multi-dimensionality of this concept and on the existence of a dual relationship between entrepreneurship and social affairs (Mair and Marti, 2006; Peredo and McLean, 2006; Nicholls, 2010; Sassmannshausen and Volkmann, 2018).

In this sense, Mort et al. (2002) argue that social entrepreneurship is only a multidimensional construct that permeates the expression of entrepreneurial behavior in order to achieve a social mission. He also points to the ability to recognize social value through the transformation of an opportunity into a real project based on proactivity, innovation, and risk-taking.

However, the main purpose of social entrepreneurship, in addition to business creation, is to meet social needs that are not yet or only partially covered by the state and/or the market sector (Alvord and al, 2004; Thompson, 2002). In contrast to a capitalist economy that persists for the achievement of strictly monetary objectives, social entrepreneurship is part of a purely solidarity-based framework, prioritizing social cohesion (Rawhouser and al., 2019).

Thus, the main rationale of social entrepreneurship is based on the treatment of social problems of a complex nature, advocating sustainable development, concerned with a reasoned use of resources and respectful of human rights. Crime, unemployment, the drug trade, social exclusion, poverty, etc. are all negative scourges caused by illegitimate or legitimate commercial activities and therefore call for the implementation of effective solutions and innovative mechanisms (Johnson, 2000; Urbano et al., 2017).

Based on the foregoing, we can rely on the definition of social entrepreneurship of Brouard and Larivet (2009, p.11) who argue that « *Social entrepreneurship is the set of activities and*

processes that consist in creating and sustaining social value by using entrepreneurial and innovative approaches and taking into account the constraints of the external environment ».

After having presented these different conceptions and definitions of social entrepreneurship, we can therefore conclude that this concept is linked to two basic elements, namely: 1- the detection and exploitation of business opportunities, through the identification of new or old problems, little or not yet resolved by already existing organizations, and 2- the creation of social value for disadvantaged or marginalized people.

2.1. Comparison between social entrepreneurship and traditional entrepreneurship

According to Levesque (2002), taking risks, innovating and developing a business project are common points between the private entrepreneur and the social entrepreneur. The distinction between the traditional entrepreneur and the social entrepreneur rests fundamentally on the nature of the project developed by the promoter(s):

- * There are risks, but they are not of the same order since they are not assumed by an individual or a group for private purposes but by a group for social purposes;
- * The means mobilized by social enterprise are different from traditional enterprise since they involve a broad mobilization of resources from the community and the State in a perspective that goes beyond a purely economic purpose for social ends;
- * The proposal combines, under democratic management, economic and social objectives, sometimes with ecological objectives.

The following table highlights the differences between social entrepreneurship and traditional entrepreneurship.

Table 1 : The differences between social entrepreneurship and traditional entrepreneurship.

	Traditional Entrepreneurship	Social Entrepreneurship
Social mission	Social responsibility is not the company's primary mission. It addresses the challenges of sustainable development but takes into account the dimensions: ecological, social, economic and governance.	The social mission is central: it is the rationale of the organization.

Economic value creation	Value is created when we sell for more than what it cost us to produce it. The entrepreneur seeks to make a profit, often maximizing it.	The ultimate goal is only to maximize profits. The search for income and profits is only a way to serve the social mission of the company to finance it and/or to ensure its sustainability.
The entrepreneur as an agent of change	The entrepreneur is an agent of change: he reforms or revolutionizes modes of production through a new combination of resources; he is an active participant in economic development.	The social entrepreneur is seen as an agent of change who exploits resources in innovative ways but to provide sustainable responses to major problems in society. It is an active participant in social change.
Opportunity	The entrepreneur identifies and exploits a business opportunity which is defined as a need not yet satisfied and that can be satisfied by the market. The exploitation of this opportunity is profitable.	The social entrepreneur identifies and exploits an opportunity for social progress; he gives an answer to a social need that is not or badly satisfied by the public authorities or by the mainstream market economy.
Profile and behavior of the entrepreneur	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Measured risk taking, uncertainty - Innovation - Commitment of the contractor and involvement in his project - Motivation: self-actualization and financial gain 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Innovation - Measured risk taking, uncertainty - Commitment of the entrepreneur and involvement in his project - Motivation: a desire for self-realization and to lead to progress in society and to create social value. - Sensitivity to social problems and the pursuit of a better society.

2.2. Social Entrepreneurship: Related Approaches to the Concept

In the previous section, we have already indicated that, to date, there is no comprehensive and universal definition of social entrepreneurship, as this concept represents a set of activities related to a given context (Nicholls, 2010). However, the relevant literature on the subject is dominated by four major terms: social entrepreneurship is defined as a dynamic process by which certain actors that can be called social entrepreneurs tend to create and develop organizations now called social enterprises (Mair and Marti, 2006; Defoumy and Nyssens 2008; Roy et al., 2016). It is therefore important to distinguish between the concepts of social enterprise and social entrepreneur because they are not identical, even if they are interrelated and sometimes misused as synonyms.

2.2.1. Social enterprise

According to the approach put forward by EMES, the social enterprise has several axes of objectives, the most important of which are: the social axis (linked to the basic mission of a

social enterprise, which is to provide services to the community), the economic axis (linked to the main activity of the organization) and the socio-political axis (linked to the implementation of democracy in the economic sphere) (Nyssens, 2007). The decision-making stakeholders (board of directors, general assembly,) of social enterprises are highly diverse.

Thus, volunteers, donors, users, workers, private investors or public funders can be considered as stakeholders depending on the type of organization. EMES insists on the collective dimension of social enterprise as the main perspective contrary to the American approach which prioritizes the figure of the social entrepreneur and makes it the main focus.

In Europe, there is a particular focus on the way of governing and on the objectives of the organization; the non-allocation of profits is not a priority in itself, whereas in the United States it is the latter point that characterizes a social enterprise (Kerlin, 2006). It should also be noted that in the United States there are more sectors covered by social enterprises than in Europe.

The following table summarizes the characteristics of the social enterprise, developed by EMES, according to three main factors: economic, social and governance.

Table 2: Summary of the characteristics of social enterprise according to EMES

Economic factor	Social factor	Governance
Production of goods or services on a continuous basis.	Purpose for community service	High level of autonomy
Significant economic risk taking	Citizens' group initiative	The ownership of capital does not create a power of decision-making.
Paid employment with a limited level	Limited allocation of profits.	Participatory dynamics

2.2.2. The Social Entrepreneur

We retain the definition of the social entrepreneur set forth by Bill Drayton, who was one of the pioneers of the school of American thought on innovation and the founder of one of the first global networks of social entrepreneurs « An individual who uses his or her entrepreneurial qualities to solve a large-scale societal problem» (Brossard, 2009).

Understanding the specificity of the social entrepreneur calls for a comparison with the traditional entrepreneur. Beyond being a project creator or a provider of capital, the entrepreneur is the one who implements new combinations to bring about an innovation (Schumpeter, 1990). However, the innovation led by the social entrepreneur is primarily aimed at meeting social needs and not only at generating economic development. Therefore, in addition to the psychological profile of the traditional entrepreneur, he or she has an involvement in social problems that refers to a desire to engage socially (Roy et al., 2016). Moreover, the distinction between the social entrepreneur and the traditional entrepreneur is mainly manifested by the primacy of the social mission in his or her activity. The creation of economic value is only a tool that enables him or her to accomplish this mission (Ashta, 2020).

Thus, we can deduce that the social entrepreneur is motivated by the creation of value but not by the economic interest of this value. This is an observation that has already been revealed by Santos (2009, p. 13), who postulates that *«what distinguishes social entrepreneurship from commercial entrepreneurship is the predominant focus on value creation, rather than on value appropriation...»*.

Table 3 briefly presents a comparison of (traditional) social and commercial entrepreneurs, highlighting their characteristics across 6 dimensions: strengths, value creation, vision, scope of products and services, benefits, risks, autonomy and opportunity.

Table 3: The difference between the social entrepreneur and the commercial entrepreneur

	Social Entrepreneur	Commercial Entrepreneur
Social mission	Central	Peripheral
Strengths	Collective experience	Skill and personal energy
Value creation	Financial autonomy in parallel with the achievement of the social mission	Financial gain and profit maximization
Vision	Long term	Short term
Scope of products and services	Visionary limitations	No restriction

Benefits	Profit is a vehicle	Profit is an end
	Reinvestment	Attributed to shareholders
Risks	Organizational Assets, Confidence and Self-image	Investors Assets
Autonomy	Making the organization non donor dependent	Taking control of your destiny rather than depending on an employer
Opportunity	Exploits the opportunity for social progress	Exploits the business opportunity within a market

Source (Brossard, 2009)

3. Elements for the implementation of social entrepreneurship: development and restraint issues

The social entrepreneurship sector is shaped by the cultural and institutional contexts in which it operates (Noya and al., 2013). According to Brouard et al. (2011), its development remains subject to several challenges that a set of strategic actors have tried to address. In this section, we discuss issues related to the legal context, financing, training (education) and support. We have chosen to talk about these issues in particular because addressing them is a necessity in order to develop the social entrepreneurship sector.

3.1. Legal context

In most countries, the legal context is seen as an issue for the development of social entrepreneurship, as the different legal forms of organizations are not recognized as suitable for social entrepreneurship (Brouard and al., 2012).

Adequate legal frameworks at the national level would then seem important to clarify the definition of social enterprises, their mission and activities (Noya and al., 2013).

As a result, social enterprises, such as associations and cooperatives, need an adhoc legal status and supporting regulatory texts enabling them to achieve their socioeconomic objectives while seeking market sustainability.

3.2. Financing

A second issue for social enterprises would be financing for start-up and growth. Social enterprises are generally funded by a combination of resources such as: commercial resources (the sale of goods and / or services), non-commercial resources (private donations and / or government grants) and non-monetary resources (volunteering) (Noya and al., 2013).

Historically, the social entrepreneurship sector has attracted few private investors.

The hybrid economic model of this sector, the slow return on financial investment proposed, and the specific collective governance mode it requires are all obstacles to the interest of the traditional financial sector (Leboucher, 2015).

The perception of high risk attached to social projects is one of the main reasons cited by investors. This perception can be explained both by the nature of the activities of social enterprises, which generally target a precarious population with little or no solvency, but also by a lack of knowledge of the sector by investors and a lack of credibility vis-à-vis traditional investors, since they most often lack guarantees (Guézennec and Malochet, 2013).

Thus, the growth of social enterprises is often slowed down by a lack of funds, or by difficult access to funders from the so-called traditional economy, especially since these organizations are in competition with for-profit enterprises, which have easier access to this funding (Brouard and al., 2012).

The problem of matching the supply of funding with the needs of enterprises is, consequently, one of the most cited obstacles in terms of funding for social enterprises (Guézennec and Malochet, 2013). The financing offers do not always correspond to the real needs and capacities of social enterprises (Si bille and al., 2014).

3.3. Entrepreneurship education

In several countries and over the past decade, there has been an increase in the number of social entrepreneurship courses in higher education (Hulgaard, 2010; Ashta, 2020). However, according to Brouard and al (2011), social entrepreneurs must possess the technical

skills of the managers of for-profit economy and simultaneously master social issues. The general lack of entrepreneurial culture is a hindrance to its development. These skills attest to the complexity of the missions carried out by social enterprises and underline the need for specific training that recognizes this complexity (Noya and al., 2013). According to (Katz, 1990), teaching social entrepreneurship is essential to prepare individuals for access to business creation. This discipline requires certain skills and attitudes that can be acquired through education, programs or training. According to a report by the European Commission, entrepreneurship education is not yet sufficiently integrated into the curricula of higher education institutions in Europe (European Commission, 2008). The author Verzat (2009) identifies four levels of objectives in order to optimize social entrepreneurship education in higher education institutions: raising awareness among the maximum number of students from all disciplines, developing an entrepreneurial mindset, training the necessary skills for potential entrepreneurs, and supporting emerging projects. According to Proulx (2004), the spirit of social entrepreneurship is still insufficiently fostered in the educational experience. For this reason, the teaching of social entrepreneurship should not be confined to the classroom, but should be incorporated into the entrepreneurial logic in general.

3.4. Support for social entrepreneurship

Leger-Jarniou and Saporta (2013), measure the importance of the function of coaching in entrepreneurship. They emphasize the fact «*that entrepreneurial initiatives need to be guided and accompanied at some stage of their process*».

According to Cuzin and Fayolle (2004), coaching must bring together a set of essential components in order to be able to achieve the expected results: duration (from several months to several years), frequency of relationships (a succession of contacts is necessary), uniqueness of the coaching structure (the relationship of trust is established with a particular consultant) and taking into account the diversity of problems faced by the business creator.

The emergence of young people's attraction to social entrepreneurship has encouraged the emergence of different support programs carried by several types of actors (associations, social enterprises, schools). What these types of programs have in common is that they support project leaders who have an idea for a project to be developed and therefore knowledge of the social entrepreneurship sector.

Today, there is still little evaluation to assess the effectiveness of programs aimed at supporting awareness of social entrepreneurship and learning how to create social enterprises. Although program evaluations in the area of entrepreneurship do exist, we have chosen not to discuss them because the absence of the social dimension that is an important element in social entrepreneurship does not allow us to make linkages or comparisons.

4. Conceptual Model

The literature review highlights several elements that we have divided into three components: elements of concept, elements of context and elements of implementation. The objective is to develop a conceptual model that includes all the aspects that make it possible to position the phenomenon of social entrepreneurship in the Tunisian context, to see what are the specificities and impacts in relation to other contexts.

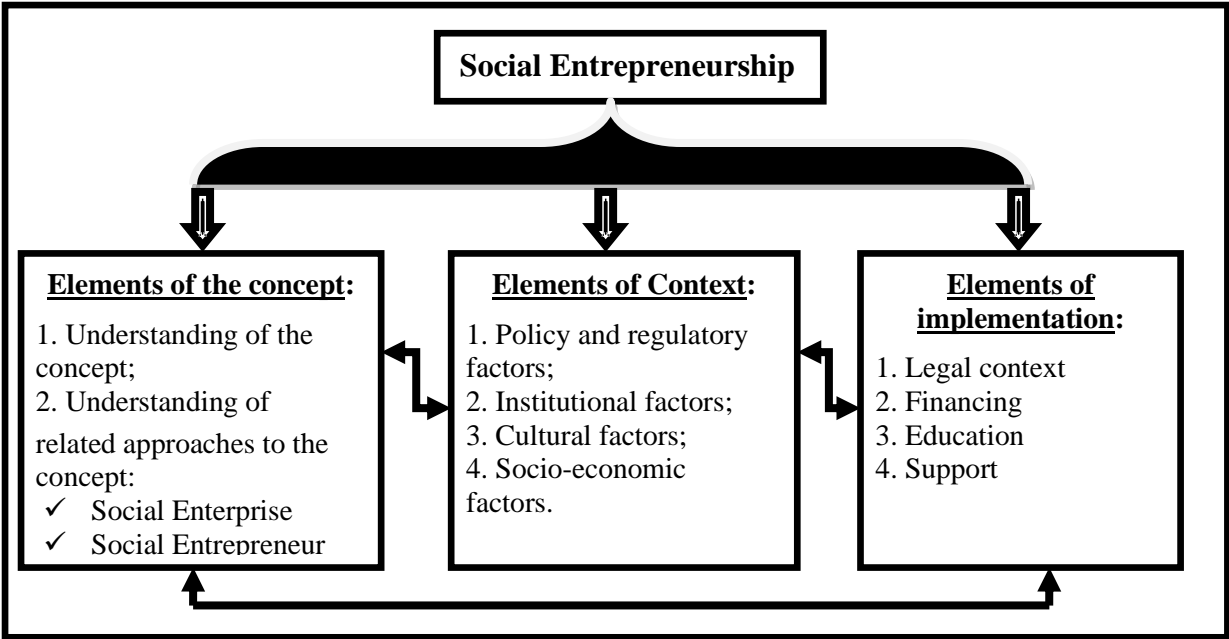


Figure1: Conceptual Model of the Different Elements of Social Entrepreneurship

5. Methodology

The nature of our study led us to opt for the qualitative exploratory methodology that allows us to explore and understand in depth the phenomenon of social entrepreneurship in Tunisia.

We followed the recommendations of Duncan (1979) who argued that the qualitative approach aims to understand human behavior according to the actor's frame of reference (Duncan, 1979).

We opted for the method of semi-directive interviews because it is a research method that promotes direct contact with one or more individuals, in order to collect research data « *It allows the researcher to collect information, and very rich and nuanced elements of reflection* » (Quivy and Van Campenhoudt, 1995, p. 194).

We did ten interviews which were addressed to the different actors of the ecosystem as well as to Tunisian social enterprises. Finally, we extracted information from the interviewees through the content analysis.

We also chose the multiple-case methodology. This choice is explained by the recommendations of Miles and Huberman (2003) who note two reasons in favor of the multiple-case study : the generalization of the results and the deepening of understanding and explanation.

According to these authors, this method allows « *to establish the degree of generality of a result or an explanation and simultaneously to identify the conditions under which this result will appear* » (Miles and Huberman, 2003, p. 272)

The selected case studies focus on four social enterprises located in coastal and advanced urban region (in the north) as well as social enterprises located in more backward areas (in the south and northeast), in order to study the different possibilities and difficulties encountered by these types of enterprises as well as geographical disparities. These four cases represent several legal forms and different sectors of activity.

Table 4 provides information on the four cases as well as an overview and comparative analysis of each of them.

Table 4: Information on the four cases studied

Enterprise	Sector	Legal status	Year of creation	Employees	Beneficiaries	Financial model
Ahmini	Social security coverage	Limited liability company	2018	20 full time	1000 rural women	For lucrative purposes
Dar Ellama	Health: residences medicalized	Limited liability company	2016	27 full time	150 elderly people and their families	For non lucrative purposes
Kolna Hirfa	Handicrafts and ways of subsistence	Limited liability company	2014	10 full time	25 women	For lucrative purposes
Nidaa El Kheir	Community Development	NGO (non-governmental organization)	2011	33, of which 21 part-time	Community of 2000 rural poor people	For non lucrative purposes

6. Results

The results follow the sequence of the components previously presented in the conceptual model relating to the concept, context and conditions of implementation.

6.1. Elements of the concept of social entrepreneurship in Tunisia

Social entrepreneurship: Entrepreneurship in Tunisia is a concept closely linked to a social value. The latter has always been seen as one of the solutions to the problem of poverty and to support regional development throughout Tunisia. Although the concept of social entrepreneurship is new in Tunisia, it is an ancient practice rooted in Tunisian society, linked to the culture of solidarity in Tunisian communities. Following the revolution of January 14, 2011, the entrepreneurial culture is growing in Tunisia thanks to the actions initiated by several social actors as well as the various programs set up by the state.

« Although several reports highlight the importance of the SE sector for the development of Tunisia, and the Middle East more generally, there is little information to understand the main factors promoting or hindering social entrepreneurship in the country » Fares Mabrouk, President of Yunus Social Business Tunisia.

Social Entrepreneur: Social entrepreneurs in Tunisia adopt entrepreneurial values such as autonomy and financial independence and increasingly integrate social aspects in their business decisions. This convergence has greatly contributed to the participation in economic activity of disadvantaged social categories such as women and young people, enabling social equity and environmental sustainability to be duly taken into account in economic processes, including business practices and economic and financial policies.

Social entrepreneurs have helped to energize the entrepreneurial environment in Tunisia by offering social benefits to the community. « *The social entrepreneur in Tunisia tries to create opportunities for self-employment. Some reports note an interest in volunteering, a preference for self-employment or the creation of personal enterprises, and the willingness of young people to contribute positively to their communities* ». Asma Mansour, President of Tunisian Center for the development of Social Entrepreneurship.

Social enterprise: Social enterprises (SE) apply business principles and therefore belong to the private sector. They can provide employment opportunities for many people, especially for disadvantaged groups such as women and youth. Social enterprises also create economic value by contributing to the decentralization of services and regional development. They can thus play an important role in service provision, particularly in rural areas (transport, short value chains, access to markets, etc.).

« *The growth of SE in Tunisia is explained by an increasing need for citizen participation in social and economic activities, which could potentially strengthen civic action, restore people's confidence in public institutions, contribute in the medium to long term to the legitimacy of the state and reduce the risk of conflict by addressing structural causes*» (Boughzala et al., 2016).

Despite the development of the SE ecosystem, no official definition exists for these Tunisian enterprises. The majority of companies that are classified as SE are actually NGOs making activities that generate profits.

Concerning the organizational modality, until this day there is not an official legal definition of the SE, they are currently considered as private companies or associations. In the artisanal or agribusiness sectors, SE can be in the form of 'cooperatives', which remains rare in other sectors.

In the absence of an accepted legal or operational definition in the country, the World Bank Group has identified the SE in Tunisia as any organization (whatever their legal form) duly registered in the Tunisian state that meets all of the following requirements:

- Tend to achieve a specific social and / or environmental objective that serves the interests of poor or marginalized populations;
- Make goods or services available to customers (through production or sale) in return for payments;
- Accept to limit the allocation of profits ;
- Are founded and managed voluntarily;
- Aim for economic sustainability and accept competition and financial risks;
- Pay employees (or have volunteers, as appropriate).

Table 5 presents a non-exhaustive but representative inventory of a number of social enterprises in Tunisia with their sectoral allocations.

Table 5 : Number of social enterprises in Tunisia according to their sectoral distributions.

Business sectors	Number of social enterprises	Percentage
Environment	11	22%
Agriculture	9	18%
Tourism	8	16%
Training and education	6	12%
Handicraft	6	12%
Health	4	8%
Disability	4	8%
Nutrition and Agrobusiness	3	6%
Total	51	100%

Source (The World Bank report, 2016)

6.2. Elements of the context of social entrepreneurship in Tunisia

With the political transition in Tunisia exerting additional pressure on the need to find alternative strategies to address social and economic problems, such as the growth of the unemployment rate since the January 14, 2011 revolution (the unemployment rate is 15% of the active population in 2019), social entrepreneurship is an opportunity to combine the entrepreneurial spirit with serving the public interest in order to solve the socio-economic problems of Tunisian society.

«The model of social entrepreneurship can be an appropriate solution to get the country out of this crisis situation and to address the socio-economic problems, including unemployment». Slim Khalbous, Former Minister of Higher Education.

Although the phenomenon of social entrepreneurship has already developed in Tunisia, with several actors mobilizing to support social entrepreneurs in the country, it remains uncommon with a few civil society initiatives launched since 2011. However, it should be noted that the family and community culture is strong in Tunisia, which fosters this spirit of solidarity among citizens as well as the possibility of collaboration to solve socio-economic problems in the country.

The growth of social entrepreneurship in Tunisia since the jasmine revolution can be attributed to nine factors:

- 1) The rise of the global social entrepreneurship movement;
- 2) The increase in the number of incubators of companies exclusively focused on SE;
- 3) An increasing number of NGOs that have tried to overcome the problem of lack of funding for SEs (e.g. the number of registered NGOs was 15,000 in 2014 compared to 9,000 in 2010) (PISM 2014);
- 4) Private companies increasingly aware of the importance of social impact in restoring public confidence and improving its image;

- 5) The need to increase citizens' civic engagement, especially in the regions, and to build confidence in the state.
- 6) A growing trend towards a social and solidarity-based economy and decentralization aimed at local development.
- 7) The increase in unemployment rates and the need to create employment through the creation of new sectors and new SMEs.
- 8) The need to stimulate personal initiative and the perception of risk in order to find innovative solutions to social problems without depending too much on government.
- 9) The need to respond to the social and economic needs of the country, especially when the government lacks capacity.

6.3. Elements of implementation of social entrepreneurship in Tunisia

6.3.1. Legal context

To date, no legal framework and no specific policies or regulations has been implemented to organize the SE sector. Nonetheless, there was one formal initiative under the social and solidarity economy program, illustrating the growing interest and support for social entrepreneurship by the state.

This initiative is manifested through the consultation launched by the Tunisian State on social enterprises, which brings together the "Tunisian General Labor Unionⁱⁱⁱ" and other key involved parties, including SE incubators. In early 2016, the Tunisian General Labor Union prepared a draft law defining the basic foundations of SE:

- A democratic enterprise with free management
- Fair management of subordinates
- Independent decision-making of state institutions

A group of experts prepared this draft law. The legal principles of SE are currently under consideration by the State (since July 2016). In the event of adoption, its usefulness and impact requires the adoption of a set of measures such as the creation of an accreditation, the

establishment of a clear and effective legal status, and the application of procedures to combat the opportunism of profit-seeking entrepreneurs who aim to obtain SE status to minimize their tax contributions.

The manager of SE Nida El Kheir 'Mohamed Lounissi' explained to us this legal failure by announcing that *« Nidaa El Kheir meets the medical needs of nearly 200 poor rural people: 22 people benefit from transport to treatment centers (three times a week per patient) while the rest benefit from affordable physiotherapy treatments. SE also provides a sustainable income for 33 qualified people and plans to expand its physiotherapy centers. The NGO status limits the development of income-generating activities. For example, the physiotherapy centers are separate entities and the integration of other medical services into Nidaa El Kheir's activities is not allowed by its legal status»*.

6.3.2. Financing

To date, no Tunisian financial institution specifically targets the social enterprise sector and social enterprises rely heavily on grants from international organizations such as GIZⁱⁱⁱ, AfDB^{iv}, Oxfam^v, UNDP^{vi}, AFD^{vii} and the European Union.

Several opportunities to access credit exist with commercial and public institutions, but the SE consulted indicated that the process of applying for loans on market terms is delicate. It takes a lot of preparation, energy and time but the results are not certain, especially in the case of public funding. This is partly due to the fact that the public financing mechanisms that are supported by the State (BTS^{viii}, BFMPE^{ix}) are mainly targeted at traditional SMEs and are not specifically aimed at SE.

« Social enterprises that have reached the growth phase generally turn to commercial banks. But in Tunisia, traditional financial institutions are reluctant to lend to social enterprises because of the risk associated with their low profit margins and participatory governance structure». Benoît Mayaux, expert at the Lab'ESS organization.

However, according to the entrepreneurs we met during our study, the process by which an entrepreneur must go through to obtain an overriding agreement and then have access to credit is time-consuming and demanding. In fact, one of these claims that « *Tunisian banks do not have the necessary risk management systems to effectively assess the credibility of business plans*».

Another challenge faced by entrepreneurs in terms of financing is the lack of capacity of the human resources responsible for managing an entrepreneurial dossier within the banks.

« *Since the revolution in Tunisia, all social problems have been countered by the activities of the Tunisian associative community, whose major problem remains access to financing and human resources.* ». Sofiane Zrelli, a member of the organization Lab'ESS.

Interviews with investors indicated a lack of SE projects with attractive investment prospects. This problem not only affects SE, but also extends to SMEs and this could be explained by two reasons:

- Lack of specific SE funding mechanisms, flexible and adapted to the different development phases of the latter;
- The underdevelopment of the Tunisian SE sector and the absence of effective economic models that can energize this sector.

The problem of financing SE was explained by the company's founder, Ms. Leila Gargouri, who declared the following: « *To date, Dar Ellama has welcomed 150 elderly people since its creation. I am really proud to solve important social problems on a daily basis thanks to my project, which responds to a growing need that interests few structures. Nevertheless, the model will be difficult to scale up until the funding problems have been resolved. The banks do not grant us credits that correspond to our status as a social enterprise, which is in violation of our expansion. We are therefore obliged to obtain loans on the terms of commercial enterprises*».

6.3.3. Entrepreneurship education

In Tunisia, the number of graduates is high, but the quality of diplomas is problematic. Indeed, young graduates lack practical skills allowing them to successfully create their own projects. Few ideas materialize in the form of SE quality because of the weak entrepreneurial culture in the country. In addition, the Tunisian labor market lacks qualified managers, which poses a problem for SE during their growth phase as they cannot offer the same salaries as for-profit enterprises.

However, it is encouraging that IHEC (the Institute for Higher Commercial Studies), one of the higher schools in Tunis, recently implemented a master in social entrepreneurship (<http://www.ihec.rnu.tn>). Numerous higher education courses in business and entrepreneurship are offered in Tunisia (although they do not specifically target social entrepreneurship):

- Master in Entrepreneurship and Entrepreneurial Culture at the University of Sfax,
- Master in business creation and entrepreneurial marketing at the University of Nabeul,
- Master's degree in entrepreneurship and innovation at the Manouba Business School,
- Professional Master's Degree in Solidarity and Social Economy at the University of Tunis.

But the number of graduates employed by SE or creating their own SE is unknown.

Despite the different degrees offered by Tunisian universities in entrepreneurship, the main challenges for entrepreneurship education in Tunisia include a lack of infrastructure and technology, a focus on theory rather than practice, and a teaching staff of uneven quality (Brisson & Krontiris, 2012).

It will firstly be necessary to ensure that teachers have the know-how and to «*develop their entrepreneurial capacities and the spirit of initiative and entrepreneurship*» (Mansouri & Belkacem, 2010, p. 35).

Similarly, the experts argue that the training system can play a more central and effective role in promoting entrepreneurial spirit from a young age and from the school phase onwards. On this subject, Meher Khelifi the founder of the company 'Ahmini' (literally: protect me) which has developed an application dedicated to rural women, told us the following *«The Ahmini application" allows these women to avoid the travel and rituals of bureaucracy and benefit from a mobile social security service whose contributions could be sent instantly in real time to the CNSS (national social security fund). The idea started years ago... At the beginning, and since I lived in a rural environment, I observed the difficulties of this environment closely and I understood the disparity and inequality between women who live there and those who live in the cities... The preparatory work to set up the business was not easy, I was not trained in social entrepreneurship and when I looked for a specialized establishment to do it I did not find. I tried to get experts in social entrepreneurship to help me set up my business but I couldn't find. Then I started with my own resources and I found it difficult to work in the field to get to know the environment, the needs and the establishment of terms of reference. »*

6.3.4. Support for social entrepreneurship

Although numerous in Tunisia, governmental technical support and assistance organizations face human resource problems, including a lack of capacity and methodology to support social entrepreneurs. In addition, and so far, the impact assessment mechanisms created are built on quantitative indicators such as occupancy and visitor rates for nurseries, without indicators of the true impact and sustainability of the activities carried out within these organizations (Brisson & Krontiris, 2012).

On the other hand, both private and individually initiated organizations face another type of challenge represented mainly by the predominance of state support organizations in the provision of services to entrepreneurs.

These private organizations are more adapted and informed of global orientations. As a result, they are better able to support entrepreneurs.

The most active programs to support social enterprises in Tunisia include:

- **LAB'ESS** (Solidarity and social economy laboratory) : The main objectives of this organization are:
 - ✓ Facilitate dialogue between NGOs and companies with a social vocation and encourage young people to create their SE,
 - ✓ Offer training, information, and assistance for the NGOs that are in the Tunisian territory through its office of associations and consulting (The BAC).
 - ✓ Support new SE created via a program that lasts twelve months of support, networking and hosting through its incubator 'IMPACT'.
- **iBDA** (launch yourself) : the first accelerator of social projects in Tunisia in collaboration with the Yunus social business foundation (YSB). This program was funded in 2014 by The African Development Bank (AfDB)
- **Yunus Social Business foundation (YSB)**: Responsible for the creation of an acceleration program and the Tunisian fund for social enterprises to support and finance (from \$50,000 to \$400,000) the most innovative SE.
- **Tunisian Center for the development of Social Entrepreneurship**: Its mission is to create an enabling environment for social entrepreneurship and to promote social innovation and impact investment in the country.
- **DEPART**, An ILO project (Economic Development and Regional Action Plan for Decent Employment in Tunisia) (2013-2015) has contributed to the regional and economic development of the country through projects with a solidarity and social orientation.

- **The way of post-revolution:** A project of the International Labor organization (ILO) aiming to accompany and support SEs intended to solve unemployment problems of women in Egypt and Tunisia.

Finally, although private support organizations are more dynamic compared to state organizations, they lack the essential knowledge to serve social entrepreneurs.

This observation was confirmed by Ms. Rania Mechergui, founder of Kolna Hirfa, a social enterprise that works on the development of handicrafts in the north-western region of Tunisia, saying *«Kolna Hirfa has trained 39 women in upscale handicraft techniques and production management. It has undoubtedly generated intangible benefits, such as increased women's confidence and an emulation effect arising from their employment within their community. The company is innovative because of its participatory and social approach, and because it directly integrates women artisans into its activity. However, the program has not improved women's livelihoods in a sustainable manner. Kolna Hirfa had a social and innovative organizational model, but she does not find the desired assistance and support. She has encountered serious problems: Competition, low demand and difficulties in accessing credit, her management capacity is limited, she has no means of transport, which would be necessary to reach the areas where the women artisans live... Partnerships, including with the State, other SE and NGOs, could help to improve community ownership (for example, through awareness campaigns) and financial accessibility (through collaboration with the State and local authorities, which can help to reduce operating costs). However, a spirit of collaboration would be necessary to ensure the company's sustainability, but this is far from being achieved».*

Conclusion

Although SE are likely to become important vehicles for social and economic development, significant obstacles will have to be faced if they are to reach their full potential. While their numbers are increasing in Tunisia after the revolution, their development still remains in the embryonic stage. A study of three components: elements of concept, elements of context, and elements of implementation leads us to conclude that the majority of Tunisian SE are still at the conceptual or experimental stage, and few of them have reached a reasonable size. The SEs identified have established relatively undeveloped partnerships, including with the State, and do not make sufficient use of innovation and technology. These realities are confirmed by stakeholders, who confirm the lack of "saleable" SE projects that are attractive to investors.

The implementation elements studied show that many of the problems encountered by Tunisian SE are linked to the obstacles faced by the ecosystem.

- **Policy and regulation.** The Tunisian context is marked by the absence of a specific framework and regulations for social enterprises. As companies, SEs are subject to corporate tax, which compromises their financial and economic viability. Their status as a non-profit organization limits the choice of their activities and their income levels.
- **Funding possibilities.** Loans on market terms are difficult to obtain because SE can rarely offer the required guarantees and, generally, have reduced profit levels. Some financial institutions and philanthropic organizations provide credits to SEs, but there are limited opportunities.
- **Teaching social entrepreneurship.** Good educational programs exist in Tunisia for young social entrepreneurs, which is promising for the new generation. But there are not enough mentoring and incubation programs to help inexperienced social entrepreneurs.
- **Support.** There is limited credible information available on the Tunisian SE sector. There is insufficient media coverage and examples of flourishing SE that could arouse the interest of the private sector and the population. The SE environment has some dynamic actors that offer

support and assistance (such as YSB and LAB'ESS), but they do not have a solid and sustainable system that could ensure the viability of the sector. The SE sector is not part of the state's economic development priorities and is rarely represented during economic-political debates.

In conclusion, we can state that SEs could be potential partners of the Tunisian State in the social and economic development of the country, by providing employment solutions for a category of unemployed and by offering services to disadvantaged populations.

Although the number of SEs has increased in recent years by attracting people interested in emerging social problems. State support is still necessary to ensure the sustainability of these enterprises and the improvement of sector in general on the one hand and on the other hand to ensure that the activities of these SEs are aligned with the country's strategic policies. However, in the absence of an active cooperative effort between policy makers and SEs the chances of development of projects within the framework of partnership between the private-public sectors are low.

The findings and results of this research could encourage the initiation of a dialogue in Tunisia between SEs and various stakeholders in the economic environment. More empirical research would be needed to explore the key success factors of the SE sector and also the various policies and support measures likely to energize this sector.

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ⁱ EMES (Emergence of Social Enterprises) is a network of recognized individual researchers and university research centers whose aim is to progressively build a European body of theoretical and empirical knowledge on the social entrepreneurship and social economy (http://www.socioeco.org/bdf_organisme-112_fr.html).

ⁱⁱ The Tunisian General Labor Union is the main trade union centre in Tunisia with 750,000 members in 2012. Founded on 20 January 1946, its mission was to unify and organize all workers and pensioners throughout the country, and to improve their economic and social situation while developing their consciousness and defending their moral and material interests. The union was part of the quartet of national dialogue that won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2015 for its success in the mission that led to the holding of presidential and parliamentary elections and the ratification of the new constitution in 2014.

ⁱⁱⁱ The German Agency for International Cooperation 'GIZ' is active in Tunisia on behalf of the German government and the European Union. Together with its local partners, it is involved in more than 45 projects and supports the development of economic policy and democracy in the country. Its priorities are: 1. sustainable economic development and promotion of employment, 2. decentralized development and governance, 3. protection of natural resources and 4. energy and climate.

^{iv} The African Development Bank is a multinational development finance institution established to contribute to the development and social progress of African States. The Bank's main mission is to combat poverty and improve living conditions on the African continent by promoting public and private capital investment in projects and programs that contribute to economic and social development in the region.

^v Oxfam is a global citizens' movement. It brings together people from all over the world who are fighting together against inequality to overcome poverty. Based in Tunisia since 2012, with more than thirty partner organizations, Oxfam focuses on three main areas of intervention: 1. citizen mobilization for governance models and socio-economic policies against inequalities, 2. gender justice and women's empowerment, 3. strengthening a free and influential space for civil society.

^{vi} The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) is one of the UN programs and funds. Its role is to assist developing countries by providing advice but also by advocating their causes for grants. UNDP's mission in Tunisia is to assist the main Tunisian actors: The Government, civil society, the private sector and other interveners to manage their transition to a more democratic, transparent, accountable and resilient society.

^{vii} French Development Agency (AFD), a public financial institution that fights poverty, supports economic growth and participates in the promotion of global public goods in developing countries, emerging countries and the French overseas territories. It operates in many sectors such as energy, health, biodiversity, water management, digital, and training. Its action is fully in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Present in 108 countries through a network of 85 agencies, AFD finances and currently monitors more than 3,500 development projects. AFD's action in Tunisia focuses on soil protection and the sustainable use of water resources (<https://www.glossaire-international.com/pages/tous-les-termes/afd.html>).

^{viii} Tunisian Solidarity Bank (BTS) was created in 1997 under the initiative of the Tunisian State to finance young higher education and professional training graduates. It specializes in meso-financing for the promotion of very small enterprises.

^{ix} The Financing Bank for Small and Medium Enterprises (BFPME) is a Tunisian public bank under the supervision of the Ministry of Finance. It covers all advisory, monitoring and financing activities dedicated to small and medium-sized enterprises.