

Science parks program in Tunisia

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ABSTRACT

A wide program of support of technology innovation is implemented in Tunisia. One of the aspects of this program is the creation of ten science parks in this decade. This wide program of creation of science parks in Tunisia is stimulated by the growth of the number of enrolled students in Tunisian universities which is actually 271 thousands, that represents 28.5% of 19-24 years old population. The number of students will be about 500 thousands in 2010 this represents approximately 49% of 19-24 years old population. About 35% of the total numbers of students in Tunisia are registered in Science and Engineering formations.

The main objectives of this program is to:

- Promote the creation of start-ups;
- Create job opportunities for university qualified students;
- Support the innovative project-holders by their housing in the science parks incubators;
- Transfer the R&D results to industry;
- Encourage foreign enterprises to install principal activity or subsidiaries in the science parks.

In addition to the science park of El Ghazala specialized in the technology of information and communication (TIC) and which is actually operational; six of the planned science parks will be created during the 10th plan of economic and social development (2002-2006). These science parks will be specialized mainly in food processing (SP of Bizerte), health applications of biotechnology (SP of Sidi Thabet), renewable energy (SP of Borj Cedria), textile (SP of Monastir), informatics, microelectronics and mechanics (SP of Sousse) informatics and multimedia (SP of Sfax). The ministry of higher education and scientific research and technology is appointed to create the science parks in Tunisia.

Science parks in Tunisia are mainly composed by four components, which are:

- Higher education institutes providing formation in the main specialities of the science park;
- Research institutes which perform R&D activities in relation with science park centres of interest;
- Technology transfer, incubator and time share units providing support to project holders;
- Production area composed of workshop relays and an industrial area.

This composition of science parks will evidently set a synergy between the different operators acting in the science park to perform the objectives aimed to be attained and in particular the emergency of a new kind of entrepreneur able to maintain a high level of competitiveness for their SME's by transferring R&D results and by technology innovation activities.

The implementation of the science parks program necessitates a subsequent effort of coordination between the different actors involved in the program. A technical committee of coordination representing all the administrations involved in this program is created at the ministry of higher education and scientific research and technology. This committee will send a quarterly report to a higher ministerial committee headed by Tunisian prime minister. The coherence and consistency of the different projects of science parks are discussed in the ministerial committee; also this authority decides the financing aspects at national and international level of the whole program.

Furthermore, a piloting committee including private and public operators for each science park is created and has the responsibility of planning the implementation of the science park, and then the promotion planning of it at the national and international level. In the first stage of the creation of the science park before the beginning of the housing of start-ups, a very small unit is set up and is responsible of the technical and administration management of the project of science park. This unit will be upgraded in a second stage to a company of exploitation of the science park.

Beside to this program, the Tunisian government has set a full array of measures in the promotion of investments in innovative enterprises and in particular those created within the science parks. The industrial property has also been reviewed to stimulate researchers in the SME's creation activities. In addition, mobility of researchers is encouraged by providing tow to four years salary to researchers aiming to create enterprises within the science parks. The financing aspects of innovative projects are also encouraged by stimulations provided to capital risk companies.

International cooperation will be helpful for the realisation of the Tunisian program concerning science parks and particularly the exchange of good practices in terms of creation and exploitation of science parks will evidently give more efficiency to the teams involved in science parks.