

THE KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

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While the concept of an economy based on knowledge has become the object of great interest in the academic and political worlds in recent years, it still remains fuzzy with respect to structure, content, and conditions of implementation. The knowledge economy is understood here as an alternative form of development resting primarily on immaterial assets.

This form of development is today unquestionably the one most appropriate for the societies on southern shores of the Mediterranean, and indeed for the region as a whole. For the northern shores, especially the countries of the European Union, the creation of a knowledge economy has been regarded since the Lisbon Summit as necessary in order to halt the supposed decline of Europe's competitiveness. For the countries on the southern shores, the stakes are still higher, as we will see below. It is a – if not the – necessary condition for the maintenance of a fragile societal balance.

As defined here, the southern Mediterranean countries have no fewer than 215 million young people under the age of 25, 138 million of whom are under 15. Given the importance of this population, it is essential that growth should be boosted strongly in these countries. The number of young people who will be seeking to enter the employment market in the next fifteen years, and for whom jobs must be made available, is far higher than anything that current growth trends can cope with. The difficulties currently encountered in developing an authentic project have already led to large-scale disillusionment among these young people with extremely negative consequences. Moreover, the fact that these economies have large numbers of jobless young people also means that they have only a weak capacity for saving. In most cases, however, they can no longer rely on flows of foreign investment sufficient to base their growth on large-scale industrialization.

It is therefore imperative for these countries to alter their form of growth so as to develop without the benefit of massive flows of capital. This is where the advantage of a knowledge-based economic strategy becomes apparent. What characterizes the knowledge-based economy is in fact its ability to produce growth and development with no massive accumulation of capital. In this sense, it constitutes a credible development alternative and a strategic objective. In the case of the Mediterranean

basin, it also possesses two further points of interest: (i) it plays a central role in communication between people and cultures by facilitating international mobility; (ii) it is a form of growth that avoids any massive replacement of labor with capital, which is the crucial point given the number of young people in the region.

1. Economies that will need to create a considerable number of jobs but are threatened by widespread disillusionment among their young people

For its report on development in the Arab countries in 2002, the UNDP asked young people from these countries to state their principal concerns. The answers are unambiguous. Unemployment came first for the older section (45%) followed by education (23%). In itself, this result is extremely logical. In most of the southern Mediterranean countries, the unemployment rate for young people is far higher than the national average (Table 1). Worse still, it increases together with the level of education and training.

The most alarming thing about this survey is that half of the young people involved expressed a desire to emigrate (with half of these planning to move to Europe). The young people thus express their deep distress and dissatisfaction very clearly, but also their pessimism as regards the future of their societies.

What makes the situation difficult to manage for countries on the two shores and explains this deep distress is the scale of the populations concerned and the unbalanced distribution of resources. As shown by the following tables drawn up for 27 of the 34 countries making up the area covered, the under-25 population in 2000-2001 was 214 million, more than half of whom (127.1 million) aged under 15. The southern Mediterranean countries alone accounted for 145.1 million (67.7%), including 94 million children aged under 15. For the same 27 countries, however, the total number of jobs was 162.2 million, 52% of which concentrated on the northern shores.

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Table 1. Unemployment Rate 2001

Countries	Total	Source	Young People	Source
Albania	22.7	WB	..	
Algeria	27.3	E	46.2	E
Bahrain	..		..	
Bosnia and Herzegovina	..		..	
Bulgaria	19.4	WB	38.4	WB
Croatia	15.8	WB	37.3	WB
Cyprus	4.4	E	10.3	E
Egypt	9.2	E	28.2	E
France	8.4	E	19.4	E
Greece	7.4	E	28.2	E
Iran	..		..	
Iraq	..		..	
Israel	9.3	E	18.4	E
Italy	9.4	E	28.1	E
Jordan	14.7	E	29.7	E
Kuwait	0.8	WB	..	
Lebanon	9.9	E	24	E
Libya	..		..	
Malta	7.7	E	19	E
Morocco	12.5	E	18.9	E
O. Palestine	25.5	E	35.6	E
Oman	..		..	
Qatar	..		..	
Romania	6.6	WB	17.5	WB
Saudi Arabia	..		..	
Serbia and Montenegro	22.3	WB	..	
Slovenia	5.9	WB	16.2	WB
Spain	10.6	E	21.4	E
Syria	10.3	E	..	E
TYFR Macedonia	30.5	WB	..	
Tunisia	15	E	29.8	E
Turkey	8.3	E	16.1	E
United Arab Emirates	2.3	WB	..	
Yemen *	11.5	WB	..	
South Med. Average	10.9		28.2	
EU (15 members)	7.4	E	14.7	E

Sources: E=Eurostat; WB=World Bank

*1999

Table 2. World Population Prospects

2000	NORTH			SOUTH			Total
Population (thousands)	0-14	15-24	0-24	0-14	15-24	0-24	
Albania				919,000	550,000	1 469,000	1 469,000
Algeria				10 622,000	6 575,000	17 197,000	17 197,000
Bahrain				201,000	111,000	312,000	312,000
Bulgaria	1 276,000	1 182,000	2 458,000				2 458,000
Croatia	765,000	612,000	1 377,000				1 377,000
Cyprus	181,000	121,000	302,000				302,000
Egypt				24 607,000	13 911,000	38 518,000	38 518,000
France	11 156,000	7 721,000	18 877,000				18 877,000
Greece	1 645,000	1 507,000	3 152,000				3 152,000
Israel				1 708,000	1 035,000	2 743,000	2 743,000
Italy	8 222,000	6 687,000	14 909,000				14 909,000
Jordan				1 957,000	1 063,000	3 020,000	3 020,000
Lebanon				1 070,000	654,000	1 724,000	1 724,000
Malta	78,000	59,000	137,000				137,000
Morocco				9 589,000	6 157,000	15 746,000	15 746,000
Oman				981,000	520,000	1 501,000	1 501,000
O. Palestine				1 482,000	596,000	2 078,000	2 078,000
Qatar				157,000	73,000	230,000	230,000
Romania	4 101,000	3 613,000	7 714,000				7 714,000
Saudi Arabia				8 784,000	4 011,000	12 795,000	12 795,000
Serbia-MonteNegro	2 116,000	1 613,000	3 729,000				3 729,000
Slovenia	316,000	291,000	607,000				607,000
Spain	5 949,000	5 965,000	11 914,000				11 914,000
Syria		3 802,000	3 802,000	6 612,000		6 612,000	10 414,000
Tunisia				2 882,000	1 989,000	4 871,000	4 871,000
Turkey				21 668,000	13 483,000	35 151,000	35 151,000
UAE				757,000	398,000	1 155,000	1 155,000
Total	35 805,000	33 173,000	68 978,000	93 996,000	51 126,000	145 122,000	214 100,000

Source: Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, World Population Prospects: The 2002 Revision and World Urbanization Prospects: The 2001 Revision, <http://esa.un.org/unpp>

Table 3. Total jobs (thousands)

Countries	North	South	Total
Albania	1 063,000		1 063,000
Algeria		6 228,772	6 228,772
Bahrain		157,400	157,400
Bulgaria		2 751,500	2 751,500
Croatia	1 469,500		1 469,500
Cyprus	309,500		309,500
Egypt		17 556,700	17 556,700
France	24 113,225		24 113,225
Greece	3 917,500		3 917,500
Israel		2 264,900	2 264,900
Italy	21 634,000		21 634,000
Jordan		852,000	852,000
Lebanon		1 246,000	1 246,000
Malta	145,587		145,587
Morocco		9 329,755	9 329,755
Oman		704,860	704,860
O. Palestine		508,000	508,000
Qatar		310,291	310,291
Romania	10 696,900		10 696,900
Saudi Arabia		5 808,617	5 808,617
Serbia and Montenegro	3 319,953		3 319,953
Slovenia	914,000		914,000
Spain	15 945,600		15 945,600
Syrian Arab Republic		4 844,020	4 844,020
Tunisia		2 788,800	2 788,800
Turkey		21 524,000	21 524,000
United Arab Emirates		1 779,000	1 779,000
Total	83 528,765	78 654,615	162 183,380

Source ILO, Laborsta

It can thus be seen that, for the countries on the southern shores, the under-15 population in 2000, i.e. those who will soon be seeking employment, was nearly 94 million, which is already 15 million higher than the employed population (less than 79 million).

To give an idea the scale of the challenge involved in meeting employment needs, it should be noted that, for the 10 MEDA countries alone, nearly 34 million new jobs will be needed by 2020, taking into account the current structure of the population and the labor markets, so as to avoid any worsening of a situation that is already far from satisfactory. Improving the situation by bringing the rate of employment, which is comparatively low in

most of the countries, into line with the EU average, will entail the creation of over 50 million new jobs (Femise, 2003). The development problem facing the southern Mediterranean countries is the risk that their primary driving force for future prospects, namely the demographic “manna”, will also misfire. The existence of a large working population can in fact constitute a powerful economic advantage, if only with respect to saving-investment cycle. Many analysts even regard this as one of the principal factors accounting for the “Asian miracle” of the 1970s and 1980s.

If this potential is to be realized, however, the “young” population must be transformed into “active” population.

This presupposes sufficient vitality on the part of the economies to create a large number of jobs, which must also be sufficiently productive so to avoid this increase in employment having a negative impact both on real wages and on competitiveness. Unfortunately, the evidence suggests that the current growth patterns cannot succeed in doing this in most of the south Mediterranean countries. Above all, the young do not believe that their countries are capable of coping and most of them wish to emigrate. In the absence of sufficient local savings, development can be funded through direct foreign investment. The south Mediterranean countries do not succeed, however, in attracting a sufficient amount of such capital to base a development strategy on these flows.

If the reasons for this lack of appeal were primarily economic or internal, a different view could be taken of the question. The attractiveness of these countries is, of course, already eroded by the continuing existence of democratic deficits, insufficiently transparent governance, and especially the conflicts still raging in the area. In the absence of medium-term political prospects, whether offered by the European Union or by thorough integration of the southern shores, it is hardly likely that the countries of the south will be able to make themselves appreciably more attractive.

Their primary competitive advantages stem in fact from their geographical (and cultural) proximity to the European Union and comparatively low wage levels. They will, however, remain in a position of inferiority for quite a long time to come in both respects in relation to the East European countries, which benefit from the political prospects opened up by joining the EU, and to the Asian countries, which have huge markets and still lower labor costs. These countries are thus unable to offer either the same investment security as the East European countries or the same return on investment as Asia. There can thus be no doubt of the overriding need to modify the form of development operating in the Mediterranean area as a whole. The view taken here is that there can be equally little doubt that the most coherent solution is the large-scale establishment of a knowledge economy.

2. Creating a knowledge economy

2.1. A concept that is still vague but real and linked to various paths of development

The development of the knowledge economy has today become a world objective, clearly recognized by the major international organizations (the European Union,

World Bank, United Nations, etc.) and regarded as one of the keys to lasting human development and growth over the next few decades. But while its effects are no longer questioned, on the basis of numerous empirical analyses (cf. the role of the global productivity of factors in economies as different as the United States, Malaysia, Finland, and the Republic of Korea), the organizational processes making it attainable are still little known and the concept itself is sometimes challenged.

Seen as a development process grounded on knowledge and information, the knowledge economy raises the legitimate question of how far it is now possible to speak of a new and alternative form of growth. Since the beginning of time, knowledge has in fact always lain at the heart of development. All the processes and institutions that permit the creation of knowledge and innovations and their transformation into products have been the major axes of the evolution of societies, not least in terms of their material wealth.

What is new and what now makes it possible to speak of a knowledge-based economy is the concomitance of various developments that form a new type of production in which immaterial assets play a key role. There appear to be three crucial points:

- a technical revolution leading to the emergence of a new technological paradigm (information technology and telecommunications);
- a change in consumption whereby services come to play an increasingly important part;
- the hybrid nature of the goods that can now be produced and marketed, of which knowledge now forms an integral part.

The recent evolution in company organization and production systems heralds the advent of a new technological paradigm based less on the exploitation of a natural resource or form of energy and more on the handling of information and knowledge.

The last few decades have thus seen the rise of many companies whose success derives not from an accumulation of massive material investments making it possible to improve production by boosting the power of machinery but from the implementation of organizational innovations that have become (immaterial) assets. These models draw their effectiveness from an innovative form of organization that is not associated with one key material investment but, on the contrary, with a series of immaterial innovations stemming from analysis of the information provided by the market and the firm's experience (skills).

The key is that the new technologies of information and communication (NTIC) today permit the processing, exploitation, creation and even trading of information in

the form of knowledge bases, something never possible before. It is the combination of information technology and telecommunications that now makes it possible for the first time.

These developments are epitomized by the music market, which has been thrown into disarray because it is no longer the place for trading a physical product (the disc, made of wax, vinyl or polymer) but the place for trading information digitized in the form of file, reproducible ad infinitum at negligible cost with no need for any additional material resource (but requiring information-processing capacity). What is shown today by many markets including information technology, cultural products (music and films above all) and even the automobile – the key product of the preceding technological paradigm – is that competitive edge depends less and less on material innovations (a car with six wheels, a new type of mechanical propulsion) and more and more on immaterial innovations such as the organization of production, variation of the material product (the family hatchback), and the ability to react to market changes connected with the processing and comprehension of data from the market and the factory. Manufacture is becoming an additional activity behind those of conception (at the level of the simple idea), design, merchandising, associated services, and so on; in short, a series of activities that are not materialized in the sense of being embodied in an object. This previously prevented their exchange (and hence an economy based on immaterial assets that can be reproduced on demand and traded). The technology now available permits their production and exchange, which gives them a price and transforms them into economic assets.

At the same time, our habits of consumption are evolving and increasing importance is attached to services. But while services account for 60-70% of national production and employment, they are still exchanged comparatively little (approximately 20% of international trade). Control over the development of the international trade (and production) of these services is, however, essentially linked to the emergence of the knowledge-based economy. Services that are consumed constitute authentic immaterial assets, and the contents of these assets are in fact connected with the processing of information and the codifying of this information and the knowledge of which it consists. The technical evolution making it possible to control these two points and the prospects opening up can be connected with a redistribution of the roles in the world economy. The requisite is thus precisely a given economy's control over the conditions and technologies for codifying the knowledge incorporated in the services provided locally so as to create assets that are immaterial but susceptible of valorization.

The assets that can now be traded are of a special nature. They are not, to be strictly accurate, traditional goods or public goods but rather hybrids whose public characteristic is modulated, among other things, by means of laws and conceptual tools such as the protection of intellectual property. In this sense, the theoretical tools making it possible to understand the economic processes in operation are well known because they regard endogenous growth.

They can therefore generate positive externalities, one of the numerous advantages of which is to foster an increase in productivity that has no negative impact on employment.

2.2. A new form of growth

The whole set of questions raised by this new form of growth cannot be globally addressed on the basis of the studies of the knowledge-based economy currently available. This is why, under its various names, it is still a fuzzy concept. If everyone is convinced of its relevance, it is rather in negative terms. From the economic viewpoint, for example, it is a key constituent element of the residue of the growth of production that does not stem from the accumulation of capital and an increase in the workforce. It is thus difficult to obtain an operational definition describing in particular its process of propagation and effects. And when such a definition is outlined, it is based on notions such as “innovation systems” and “knowledge markets”, which are not appropriate for the situation on the southern shores of the Mediterranean, which are themselves still under discussion and comparatively vague, and which do not convincingly establish any macroeconomic correspondence in terms of growth and employment.

An understanding of these phenomena and the creation of a different form of growth more in line with the characteristics of the southern Mediterranean countries will, in our view, require conviction on the following points:

- The term “knowledge economy” is designed to identify a new form of growth based on transformations affecting the organization of public and private economic agents in their strategies of knowledge production and use.
- The knowledge economy is an economy regarding all sectors
- It is an economy based on an inexhaustible resource whose capacity for renewal is more important than initial stock. Considerable progress is thus possible when the dynamics of training and innovation come into play.
- Productive services play a central role in this, as do the constant improvement and upgrading of work.

- An institutional framework conducive to private initiative and good infrastructures (especially ICT) are essential to the production and transferring of knowledge and the creation of a constantly developing innovation system.

This alternative form of growth and development depends on mechanisms involving four essential aspects:

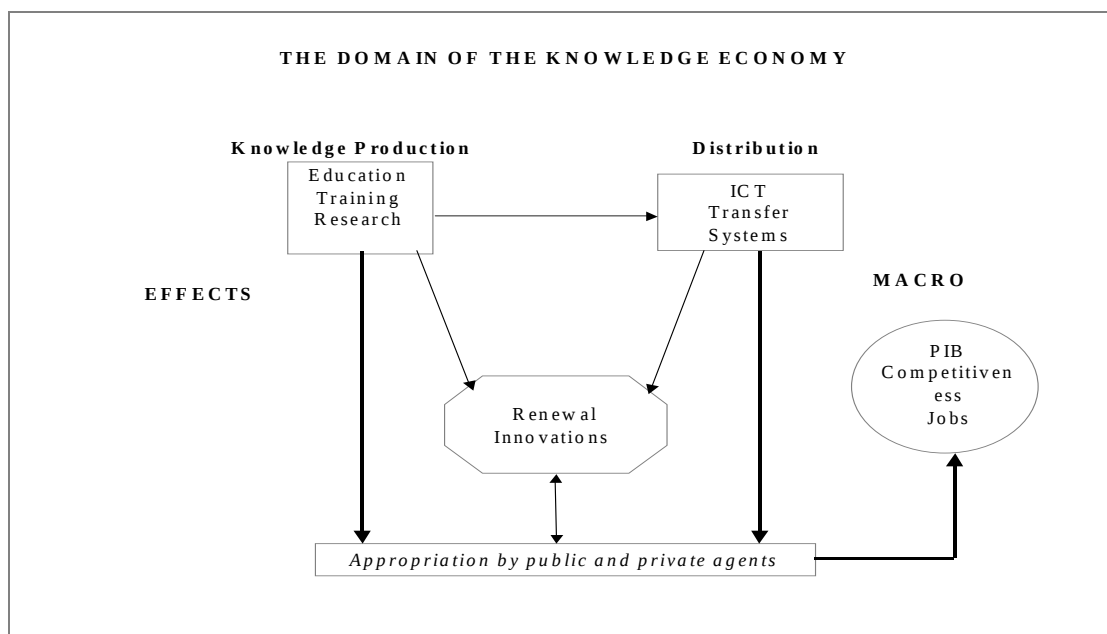
- The production of the knowledge starting from the major basic functions of education, training and research
- The dissemination of knowledge, a key element giving it its horizontal character in all sectors and concerning not only ICT but also publishing all vehicles of transfer, etc.
- The renewal of knowledge through innovation
- The penetration of knowledge in the various sectors of administration, agriculture, industry and services.

An operational definition making it possible to work out strategies for its implementation and the effect of the policies selected requires a clear view of what constitutes production, transfer, and assimilation by economic agents. Producing employable graduates and setting up transfer systems is not sufficient to obtain a precise idea of how knowledge penetrates the economy and its effects. Value is truly created when private and public economic agents appropriate knowledge, use it to increase their productivity, and are competitive so as to give the products effective value on the national and international market. It is there that the process makes it possible to create jobs. The crucial point is that if the form of growth is to be changed and new jobs are to be created, it is essential to facilitate the penetration of the knowledge-based economy into every segment.

Fortunately for the southern Mediterranean countries, youth can act as a driving force in this connection. As Michel Serres points out, while “parents” impart knowledge and science to children, it is children that teach parents the new technologies.

The first step required is to avoid restricting the field of application. When speaking about the knowledge economy, it is necessary to go beyond innovation, technology, and ICT. It is equally necessary to take into consideration everything that improves and certifies product quality (standardization processes, quality control, improvements in marketing, design, etc.) and makes progress possible along the chain of value with a reduction in material investments and the employment of immaterial investments. It should also be borne in mind that every private or public corporation that innovates, reorganizes, and sets up a network or knowledge base becomes a producer of knowledge and, after a certain threshold, participates in the knowledge economy. Generalized to encompass the economic (and social) sphere as a whole, the knowledge-based economy functions as an interdependent system whose four elements must be brought into operation in a coherent and synchronous fashion (see the diagram above). If one of the elements is missing, the system cannot be guaranteed to function.

The production of knowledge must therefore be conceived in relation to the demand expressed by economic agents and provide a response to social demand. Action at this level is often difficult. In the Mediterranean countries, social demand is oriented towards the protracted stages of the human sciences, while economic demand focuses on skilled technicians.



It can be clearly seen that increasing the number of students in long courses may be wholly inappropriate if the training does not enable them to find employment. In this connection, there is above all the need for a change in perspective and culture. Instead of the traditional diploma, which is basically an authoritarian process of social branding corresponding to the era of the nation states, a knowledge-based economy focuses on skill, which is essentially cosmopolitan and more in line with the era of globalization. It thus offers a response to the demand expressed by the young, for whom education occupies second place in the list of concerns according to the UNDP survey mentioned above. On the one hand, it combines training and employability. On the other, it instills the habit and motivation for self-training, another essential aspect that brings us to the concept of lifelong education.

In the same way, for a knowledge-based economy to be functioning it is not sufficient that research expenditure should be equal to a certain proportion of GDP. It is also necessary to ensure that academic research is not isolated and leads to the development of patents, which is, however, seldom the case in the Mediterranean countries. The agents of transmission (infrastructures and various transfer systems) must function at full capacity and with a view to increasing productivity and upgrading national output on the value chains. In this connection, the creation of telecommunications infrastructures or the opening up of the telecommunications markets is essential. But if the process goes no further, the profits will go solely to the manufacturers of materials and a few operators. The aim must be to expand use.

3. The key lies in appropriation and dissemination

The point upon which everything hinges is the appropriation of knowledge by public and private agents. The knowledge-based economy can only “emerge” if it is broadly appropriated and used to create new value. It is the shape that this appropriation takes and its intensity that will determine whether there is any change in the form of growth. In this sense, when seeking to formulate strategies permitting the emergence of a knowledge-based economy, it is useless to insist on mechanical recipes involving no more than the funding of projects. What is required is a new attitude and even a new culture, the emergence of which must be fostered. This is the culture of networks, individual autonomy, the use of the memory hidden in tacit knowledge, and the capacity to turn this tacit knowledge into codified tools that will make it possible to improve the quality of products and services, and to conceive better overall strategies at a broader level. It should be clearly understood that this entails a cultural revolution, with the culture of capital

giving way to the culture of knowledge. Strategy is no longer to be focused on accumulation and capitalization but on the formation, identification, codification, dissemination and added value of knowledge. The dissemination of ICT in the Mediterranean, and especially the south, is symptomatic of the fundamental importance attaching to the appropriation of the form of growth and its mechanisms by the population.

As pointed out above, it is a mistake to see the knowledge-based economy solely in terms of technological aspects. At the same time, however, these technologies do play a crucial role in the effective implementation of this form of development, especially because they involve shorter periods of training while bringing about a radical change in skills, which is the basis of their key role in the dissemination of information. Nevertheless, they are double-edged, as is knowledge in the broad sense. Depending on their diffusion, they can be a factor of integration or a factor of segregation: (i) in general terms, broad diffusion in the sense of possibility of use makes it possible to trigger a more dynamic form of growth; (ii) each segment of population, territory or sector denied the possibility of access is marginalized. The crucial point is their role in the modification of societal processes, the way in which they are used, and the actors’ strategies based on them, which make it possible to identify authentic change in the form of production.

In the field of ICT, the Mediterranean area experiences a twofold gap between north and south (cf. Etude Femise, ADIS-Réseau EMMA, 2004).

The first gap between north and south is the well-known difference in terms of infrastructures clearly identified in all of the studies on this subject. This difference is, however, unquestionably the least relevant and the least lasting for a number of reasons:

- In all of the southern Mediterranean countries, as in the majority of developing countries, a significant effort of infrastructure construction took place at the end of the 1990s.
- These differences ultimately depend solely on financial aspects in terms of investments, which are unquestionably the easiest to change in the sense that the degree of inertia is weak.
- There is even a specific advantage for the developing countries in their process of catching up (follower advantage), in that those acquiring equipment later often do so with the most advanced and successful goods. Given the broader choice of materials available, already developed and perfected through introduction in the developed countries, they can also select those most appropriate for their specific situations.

This is not the essential aspect of the problem of the development of the knowledge-based economy in the Mediterranean in that the elimination of this gap depends primarily on clearly identified economic and decision-making levers.

There is, however, a second gap defined in terms of use. This one is crucial and symptomatic of real entry into a knowledge-based economy, (i) because it is this aspect that can create divergences in development, and (ii) because the sociological levers of changes involved here are most inert in that they are grounded on habit.

This second gap, which we see as the most important, is present on a large scale in the south of the area. Based on surveys involving over 400 companies in the south of the Mediterranean, the Femise study carried out by ADIS (2004, op. cit.) reveals the following:

The diffusion of the use of ICT appears to be fragile in that companies adopt or have adopted these devices with no strategic consideration of what they have to offer. In most cases, the installation of ICT equipment stems from a whole set of favorable circumstances and seldom from a choice guided by a strategy of competitiveness. The entrepreneurs do not regard ICT equipment as an authentic and essential factor of production but rather as symbols of hierarchical position and power inherent in the traditional forms of growth. There is in fact practically no case of organizational modification prompted by the adoption of ICT, even though it is one of the crucial elements in the capacity to create more growth. As the study indicates, this type of diffusion makes only a slight contribution toward increasing productivity, reducing transaction costs or improving company flexibility and competitiveness. It can thus be seen as passive adoption involving no real appropriation on the part of those concerned.

The factors of obstruction identified are also rich in information. If the cost is quoted, it includes not only purchase but also maintenance and training. Added to this are the costs of a low level of education (especially in English) and of skills (especially as regards computers).

We are now at the heart of the question of a strategy for the development of a knowledge-based economy. The aspects of education, training and ICT are very important, but not in the way generally indicated in the literature. It is not their quantitative aspects that reveal

the true level of emergence of this form of growth. Their essential role regards qualitative aspects as agents (or catalysts) of diffusion. They highlight the fact that the key lies in the processes of adoption and diffusion, which are unfortunately those to which the least attention is devoted, especially in the developing countries. Today's young people are perfectly capable of narrowing this digital divide connected with use because, once correctly initiated, they master the new tools at their disposal very quickly. In this sense, the hope lies in the number of young people on the southern shores of the Mediterranean. They are in the front line of change and the ones most endowed with an innovative vision of the use of these factors. The essential lever does not lie primarily in levels of schooling or the availability of information and communication equipment. These are in fact only approximations making it possible to evaluate the potential for diffusion of access in order to develop use, which is the real key. It is by training the young in the basic elements making it possible to develop use (in technical terms above all), recognizing the skills acquired in connection with traditional systems through official forms, and facilitating access to infrastructures and then labor markets that the Mediterranean economies will respond to the primary concerns not only of their young people but also of their economies. It is thus that they will come to constitute knowledge economies.

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