

American University in Cairo

AUC Knowledge Fountain

Theses and Dissertations

Student Research

Summer 6-8-2022

The Role of Civil Society Organizations in Youth Inclusion Reforms in Post-Uprising Tunisia

Amal Tobich

The American University in Cairo AUC, amaltobich@aucegypt.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://fount.aucegypt.edu/etds>

 Part of the [Development Studies Commons](#), [Leadership Studies Commons](#), [Organization Development Commons](#), and the [Public Affairs, Public Policy and Public Administration Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

APA Citation

Tobich, A. (2022). *The Role of Civil Society Organizations in Youth Inclusion Reforms in Post-Uprising Tunisia* [Master's Thesis, the American University in Cairo]. AUC Knowledge Fountain.

<https://fount.aucegypt.edu/etds/1944>

MLA Citation

Tobich, Amal. *The Role of Civil Society Organizations in Youth Inclusion Reforms in Post-Uprising Tunisia*. 2022. American University in Cairo, Master's Thesis. *AUC Knowledge Fountain*.

<https://fount.aucegypt.edu/etds/1944>

This Master's Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Research at AUC Knowledge Fountain. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of AUC Knowledge Fountain. For more information, please contact thesisadmin@aucegypt.edu.

The American University in Cairo

School of Global Affairs and Public Policy

**THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS IN YOUTH
INCLUSION REFORMS IN POST-UPRISING TUNISIA**

A Thesis Submitted to the

Public Policy and Administration Department

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Public Administration

Submitted
By

Asma Tobich

Under the Supervision of
Dr Ghada Barsoum, PhD

Summer 22

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this thesis to all the Tunisian faithful martyrs who were slaughtered in an attack in the Mount Chaambi district during Ramadan in July 2013.

They chose to be killed rather than to give themselves up. This was the deadliest attack on Tunisia's armed forces since its independence.

To every soul fighting for the peace of the country and to their families and friends.

May their souls rest in peace with the other martyrs of Terrorism.

Acknowledgments

This thesis would have not been possible without the support and guidance from my supervisor Dr. Ghada Barsoum. Her patience and continuous support during this research. I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Laila El-Baradei, Dr. Noura Wahby, Dr. Shahjahan Bhuiyan, and Dr. Charles Kaye-Essien for their active guidance, help and encouragement and to all of those with whom I have had the pleasure to work with during this or any other related projects throughout my Master's degree.

I am also hugely thankful to the GAPP School for the outstanding support throughout my studies that prepared me to acquire a valuable and highly accredited master degree.

Nobody has been more important to me in the pursuit of the Master's degree than my family members. I would like to thank my mother, whose love and support were my guiding stars. I would like to thank my father, my ultimate role model and my backbone. To my sister and brother who were there at my lowest moments. Thank you for always believing in me and providing me with unending inspiration.

I am ineffably indebted to my friends whom I consider my second family. You might not know this, but you helped me find happiness in being the person that I really am. You kept me going, and this Thesis would not have been possible without you.

A special thanks to all the participants in this research, for accepting to be part of this, for your support, dedication, and flexibility.

The American University in Cairo
School of Global Affairs and Public Policy
Department of Public Policy and Administration

THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS IN YOUTH INCLUSION REFORMS IN POST-UPRISING TUNISIA

Asma Tobich
Supervised by Professor Ghada Barsoum

ABSTRACT

Tunisia has a large youth population; more than half of the population are youth aged between 15-30 years in 2011. Tunisia has long faced challenges adopting serious reforms for youth inclusion and participation. Young people, especially since the Arab Spring, are driving social and economic innovation, challenging policies, and representing governments. More connected than ever, young people exert a greater influence on their fellow citizens and their country and youth inclusion is a central aspect of the post-2015 global development agenda. This study seeks to determine the role of Civil society Organizations in youth inclusion by drawing on extensive literature results as well as detailed qualitative research based on extensive in-depth interviews and direct consultation with civically engaged young people, Civil society Organizations, experts in the field, funds providers and public institutions officials. In addition to a desk review that draws on the guidelines of youth involvement. This qualitative analysis is combined with an overview of the international programs that improve youth empowerment. Findings from this research and analysis form the basis of several proposals for new policies and approaches specifically focused on youth in Tunisia. Interviews were conducted with representatives from CSOs, young men and women who participated in governmental youth initiatives and are currently working in public positions. Moreover, interviews were conducted with civil society representatives and civically engaged youth after the uprising who shared their insights on the issue of youth participation in public reforms and decision-making. The analyses show noticeable regression in youth participation and progress initiatives aiming to meet their requests. This analysis shows that there were various structural adjustments and laws passed to better serve these youths' interests and that is a promising indicator of the state's commitment to youth. However, there is a need to expand the youth representation in these initiatives through empowering civil society organizations and maintaining a comprehensive set of policies to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of these efforts and the re-establishment of trust between youth and the public institutions.

Table of contents

Chapter I: Setting the Frame	7
I.1. Introduction	7
a. Problem statement	8
b. Study objectives	9
c. Research question	10
I.2. Conceptual framework	12
a. Conceptualizing youth and their inclusion	13
b. Conceptualizing CSOs	13
c. Conceptualizing donors' community	14
Chapters II: Youth Inclusion; an Objective or a Project	15
II.1. Key challenges for youth inclusion	15
a. Inclusion and exclusion of youth	15
b. Between trust and fragility	16
II.2. Priority areas and global narratives	19
a. Inefficient efforts	19
b. Communication gap	20
c. Pre-tailored norms	20
Chapter III. Literature Review	24
III.1. Civil society and youth	25
III.1.1. Actively engaged youth, CSOs, and institution's definitions	25
a. Civil society and actively engaged youth definition	25
b. Institutions and inclusion definitions	27
c. Youth and reforms definition	28
III.1.2. Youth inclusion today	29
III.1.3. Civil society mobilizer role	30
a. Translators of meanings	30
b. Government's role	31
c. Containers of aspirations	32
III.2. Institutions and youth mobilization through CSOs	33
III.2.1. Youth institutional framework	33
Chapter IV: Research Methodology	37

a.	Qualitative research design and sampling	37
b.	Data collection	38
c.	Data analysis	41
d.	Ethical considerations	41
Chapter V:	Study Findings	43
V.1.	The perception of youth and CSOs on the role of the public institutions	43
a.	Bureaucracy and complex systems	43
b.	Instability and security	47
c.	Building ties with youth institutions	49
d.	Corruption and lack of adequate communication channels	53
V.2.	Damaging in youth perceptions to CSOs	57
a.	Networking opportunity and creating local change	57
b.	Disorganized, no unity	59
c.	Easy money and corruption	59
d.	Depoliticization of youth	61
e.	‘Our’ compared to ‘their’ discourses	62
f.	Gender roles	63
V.3.1.	Unemployment after activism	64
a.	Stagnation: No representation, no more learning, no jobs	64
b.	Youth disenfranchisement: Education and Escape	65
V.3.	Donors’ discourses	66
a.	Local needs and global narratives	67
b.	Alternative sources of funds and innovation	68
c.	No transparency - <i>en vogue</i> approach	69
V.4.	CSOs and funds	70
a.	Lack of representation: Businessman of CSOs	70
b.	Real change agents	72
c.	Income generator and political agendas	73
Chapter VI:	Conclusion and Recommendations	75
a.	Conclusion	75
b.	Recommendations	78
References		80
Appendix A:	Interview Questions	83

Chapter I: Setting the Frame

I.1. Introduction

In 2011, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region witnessed uprisings that led to the withdrawal of the Tunisian and subsequently the Egyptian regimes, then later in that year, the ruling regimes in Libya and Yemen (Hamanaka, 2016). These uprisings were initiated and led by young people, civilians, and vulnerable groups of the societies and introduced a new way of change and activism (Maganga, 2020). This is a new relationship between civil societies as movable engines and critical drivers in facilitating and implementing well homogeneous transitions. The experiences of Tunisia and Egypt feature prominently in the literature; in fact, this topic is a central concern of both Middle Eastern and Western scholars (Sarmad, 2019).

The collapse of regime leaders during the so-called Arab Spring unlocked the window of change in various MENA countries and called for a critical reconsideration of the public development strategies and reforms (Barsoum, 2018). The empowerment among youth will only occur if civil society (CS), public institutions, and political leaders jointly grasp the cultural bases of democracy and emerge in a fruitful dialogue (Kubicek, 2014). The emergent concerns over the impact that does have on youth inclusion reforms led to calls for the active civil society layers to push forward with their demands (Kubicek, 2014).

This main purpose of this study is to investigate the role of Civil society organizations (CSOs) in youth inclusion reforms post-uprising Tunisia. Putting much focus on one side, with less research on the tension between the ‘will’ of young people and expressing a ‘policy’ designed to target their needs, especially when this confronts the west’s security interests (Tagma, 2013).

My central research question explores the role of young peoples’ civic power in the enactment of youth inclusive reforms in Tunisia. The literature review part will take cases from other countries such as Egypt that have similar experiences. Given that CSOs shaped the synergistic dialogue between public institutions and active youth, they had a lot of contribution to pushing government entities to adopt various adjustments serving the youth’s public interest. According to these expectations, such interactions would result in greater structural reforms, an enforcement of civil society’s role, and a less external domination in policy reforms (Sayed, 2020).

The Arab awakening testifies to the magnitude of change that can be brought by the mobilization of young people and how civic action can be used to carve out a public space that had been forcibly kept in check by autocratic regimes (Center, 2013). It has been twelve years since the uprising that was mainly led by Tunisian's active youth, whether in CSOs or independently. The new Tunisian constitutional law of 2014 that emphasizes youth participation as a key pillar of the social, economic, and political development of the country. Still, the youth development index touched 0.59 ranking it 110th of 183 in the world (Haloues & Nahmeh, 2014). Eventually, it showed a slight improvement in 2018, to an index of 0.739, bringing it to 91 of 183 in the world (UNDP, 2019).

Before the uprising, the number of CSOs who were involved in politics constituted the majority. The sole goal of creating an NGO was to promote the image of the old regime such as "BASMA Association for the Promotion of Employment of the disabled is an NGO that was founded by Tunisia's ex-First Lady" (Center, 2013; Civil society in Tunisia: from islands of resistance to tides of political change , 2019). Civil society was purely allied with the government with a huge difficulty of freely participating in a transparent manner and in a fully respectful open environment without any ties or pressures. Right after the uprising, during a climate of political division, young people came up with an informal and an indirect way of political participation that rejects the traditional views of the political parties, which is civil society activism (Center, 2013).

a. Problem statement

There is a new relationship between CSOs as movable engines and critical drivers in facilitating and successfully implementing homogeneous transitions. After the uprising, there was an influx of civil society organizations emerging not only in Tunisia, but also in the entire Middle East and North Africa Region (Sika, 2018, 240).

Their role was pivotal in coordinating and connecting the welfare gaps by providing services or alternative channels to their voiced need (Sika, 2018, 243). Thus, they did not have centralized leadership nor centralized organization, as described by Bamyeh "they found themselves relying on the 'clean part' of the old regime to finish the revolution on their behalf" (Bamyeh, 2016, 76). The 'Clean part' are individuals who did not have any political engagement and were not tied with the previous regime whether through political parties or individually. The collapse of regime leaders during the so-called Arab Spring unlocked the window of change in

various MENA countries and called for a critical reconsideration of the public development strategies and reforms (Barsoum, 2018).

In observing a young generation marked by many social and economic struggles where civil society organizations are limited by institutions and reforms: we see a contrast in the relationship between robust and active CSOs in creating tension between their will and the necessity to design a strategy to target their needs. A study by USAID pointed out recently that “72% of Tunisian CSOs do not believe that the current legal and structural framework either does not provide for CSO participation in policy and legislative processes at the national level or only partially provides for it” (USAID, 2018, 5). In addition, today, less than two-in-ten Tunisian youth (17%) say they are still interested in politics, according to the fifth wave of the Arab Barometer surveys (Tunisia: Youth Take a Stand for/against the President’s Decisions and Watch in Limbo, 2022). Both studies state that there is little happening with youth engagement, the question comes what needs to be improved or changed. After the uprisings, it became crucial to relativize the concept of social involvement, re-define social contracts with public institutions, and limit the donors-centric approach rather than simply improve our understanding of how civil societies' activities and orientations could or could not impact and shape such reforms starting from the institutions.

b. Study objectives

This study aims to shed light on the current perception of civically active youth in Tunisia, their representative institutions, and their socio-political situation. The findings of this paper seek to contribute to the increased understanding among policymakers and public institutions of the issues faced by youth. It also seeks to strengthen the capacity of policymakers to formulate and implement cross-sectoral policies that enhance the effective participation of youth in economic, social, and political life. This paper aims to create an enhanced engagement between policymakers and youth groups in jointly designing, reviewing, and implementing youth-based policies for inclusive and sustainable development. The paper will focus on the unsteady depoliticization and disenfranchisement of youth and on their experience of civil society engagement as well.

After nearly 12 years post the uprising, formerly engaged youth have either taken jobs or left the country. Thus, investigating this topic again will emphasize even more on its importance and

on the unchanged scene despite the extensive research and reports written about this topic. Moreover, despite having youth at the core of the revolution itself, there is no youth national policy and youth inclusion is left as an unfinished project. “A multidimensional youth policy is needed to reduce barriers to youth inclusion and facilitate youth contributions to Tunisian society” (World Bank, 2014). Recently, in 2016, new voices from civil society started calling out again for the implementation of at least a National Youth Council. To accompany youth to overcome the lack of a youth public policy. With the intervention of strategic CSOs, INGO partners, and the government, the framework of discussion got set. Thus, despite the realized progress: “Real work is just beginning. Participants are, now, committed to achieve an ambitious agenda” (UNESCO, 2022).

The literature available regarding this research topic is outdated and limited. One of the primary purposes of this study is to highlight the role of these civically engaged society groups on youth inclusion reforms in Tunisia by understanding the challenges of having reforms serving youth’s full inclusion to contribute to the social cycle. Based on the study’s results, recommendations will be presented to highlight the role and importance of having an inclusive, collaborative framework where CSOs, youth, public institutions, and the interactions with the community of donors contribute to the preparation or more engagement among youth and to facilitate their empowerment and development. The community of donors played a vital role in sponsoring several local initiatives and projects. USAID reported in their research that the primary sources of funding- as reported by the CSO stakeholders surveyed indicated that the largest share of organizations are dependent on donations from individuals and foreign funders (USAID, 2018, 36).

c. Research question

Based on the above-stated problem and research objectives, the research question proposed for this thesis is:

“What is the Role of Civil society Organizations in Youth Inclusion Reforms in Post-Uprising Tunisia?”

Through this qualitative research study, the study will investigate the role of CSOs in the inclusion of youth in civic, political, and economic life through their empowerment.

Furthermore, it will also assess the effectiveness of their role and of the community of donors’

discourses in shaping those patterns. The research question takes cases from Egypt in the literature review section to what they have or similar in their experiences given that civil society shaped the synergistic dialogue between public institutions and active youth.

The research question sheds some light on the influence of the forces that civically engaged youth channels through CSOs in shaping Youth Empowerment Reforms. From one side, the direct interactions that CSOs have with youth rehabilitate these reforms via the public institutions' legacy. On another side, the maturity of the discourse of CSOs drives youth to request more pointed reforms and to have a stricter implementation. The variable ties between CSOs and active citizens, specifically youth, are playing an intermediate role in connecting their different visions and aspirations to institutions. Civil society- as a container for youth, can develop and provide them with new experiences and influence the formal elements to achieve a balance of power.

Accordingly, this main theme includes. Sub research questions to establish a well-structured analysis as per the following questions:

1. What are the discourse institutions and the challenges faced: internally, externally, and on the implementation level of real, tactical reforms.?
2. How can youth get to effectively participate in their inclusion?
3. To what extent civil society objectives are being met and on how progress activities can better meet the requests of youth during this period in the history of the region and under this international structural guidance?
4. What is the CSOs contribution in pushing government entities to adopt various structural adjustments serving the public interest?
5. How is the general situation of active youth in Tunisia in relation to participation in decision making and their motives behind their involvement in civil society?

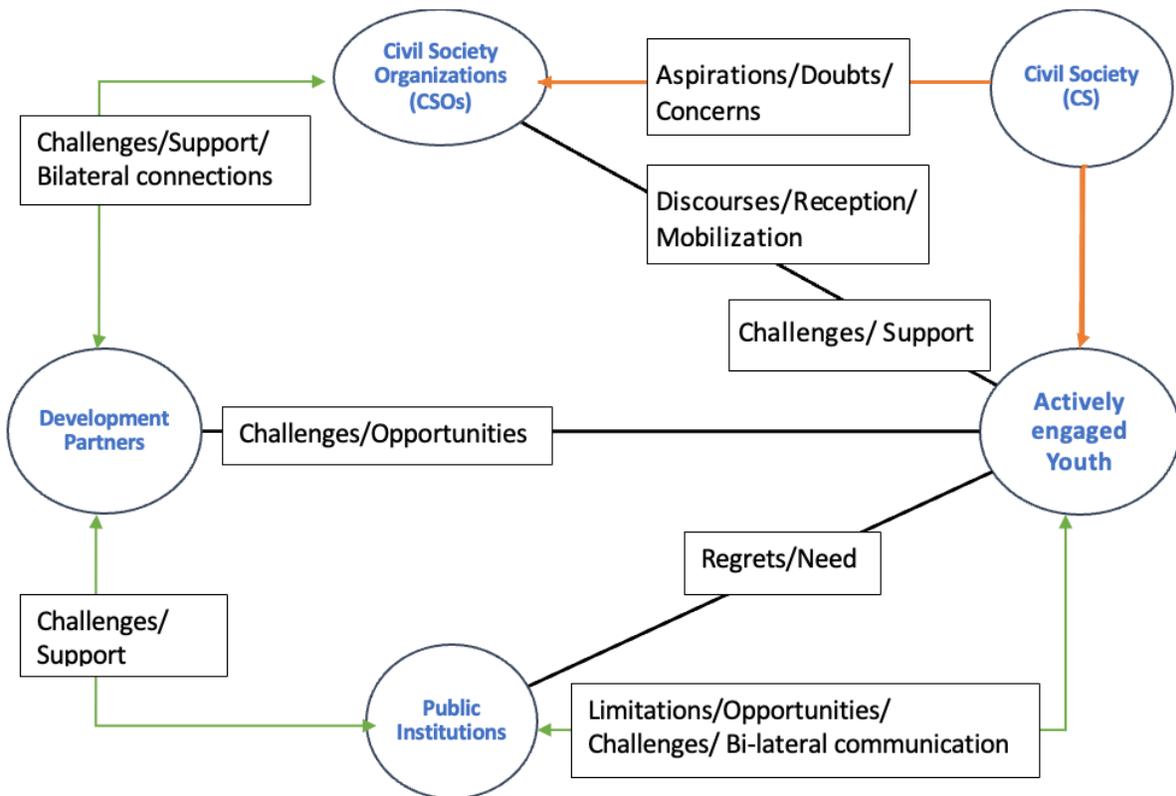
Researching this question gave me a considerable understanding of the role of CSOs in the civil society scene whether in connection with the youth demands, the public institutional framework, or the community of donors' discourses. The analyses of the research findings is more or less similar to the literature review findings, thus, some new findings and gaps were found, emphasizing the need to have a better understanding and review of this topic.

I.2. Conceptual framework

Based on the findings in the literature review, the following conceptual framework was used to help us better understand the coordinated mechanisms.

The conceptual framework (CF) illustrated in **Fig 1** will focus on the important terminologies that will be at the center of the research study and establish a link between civil society organizations formed by engaged youth as an intermediate key player term and a potent emergent agent of change. A big umbrella called civil society where youth and CSOs are key components. The conceptualization will highlight simultaneously the interactions with the public institutions as a pivotal element.

Fig 1: Conceptual Framework



Source: Author's compilation based on (Volpi, 2015; Pierre Tainturier, 2016; Belschner, 2021)

a. Conceptualizing youth and their inclusion

Actively engaged youth are a key player in the CF. They are well included in civil society, they do have direct and indirect interactions with CSOs in a way to transmit their needs, aspirations, doubts, and concerns. Through their activities, CSOs mutually interact offering a space to receive and mobilize this mass of active youth through their own channels and discourses playing a mediator role. Their involvement in CSOs must be questioned as an enabling factor towards political, social, and economic inclusion. Their activism and participation is, albeit, seen as a core principle and an objective that ought to drive policies dedicated to youth, from grassroots to national networks (Tainturier, 2016).

On the other hand, these youth are in light bilateral communication with their public institutions only since there is no national policy¹ for them (Factsheet Tunisia, 2014). Losing what is left of their ties with the official public structures representing them despite the opportunities offered. These opportunities are coupled with challenges and several limitations. These challenges transform youth's concerns into more forms of more needs, frustration and regrets. Both dynamics with the public institutions and with CSOs present external challenges to their own inclusion process creating pressure and a turbulent environment. In that ecosystem, another external component emerges which is the community of donors. This component does not have linked ties with youth but work mainly with public institutions and with CSOs to give support. This sponsorship is coupled with certain challenges and has been offered with certain patterns.

b. Conceptualizing CSOs

The uprising offered CSOs a great extent of freedom to participate in social life and to have a safe space where they can feel empowered and showcase their capabilities. Thus, challenges coming from delays in the forms of long- hectic administrative paperwork, formal and rigid bureaucracy, and the lack of collaboration were hindering and dispersing their efforts. The three parts in the CF are mutually interacting to ensure youth inclusion on various levels. CSOs became a strong player in translating and linking youth's aspirations with their specific discourses on ideas and mobilization to facilitate youth emergence in public life through containing their hopes and voices.

¹ <https://www.youthpolicy.org/factsheets/country/tunisia/>

CSOs had a lot of contribution in pushing government entities to adopt various structural adjustments serving youth's public interest. According to these expectations, such interactions would result in greater structural reforms, an enforcement of civil society's role, and a less external domination in the policy reforms orientations (Sayed, 2020). Barsoum (2016) emphasized on that by outlining a positive relationship between the popularity of a citizen proposal and its likelihood of becoming and passing as a constitutional provision reflecting the role of public concerns and pressure on the Tunisian constitution yet a formal youth national policy is not present so far Since 2013, there is no youth national policy and the implementation is by the Ministry of Youth, Sports, Women and Families.

Post 2011 Uprising had the emergence of a new category of actively engaged groups that could be classified into three big groups:

- 1) Informal networks, leaderless, horizontal, and spontaneous youth organizations: These CSOs were not created as a product of a formal process. They are not the result of any formal political groups, are not ideologically or religiously uniform, but have rather different worldviews and priorities including community based and faith-based organizations.
- 2) Unconventional Online participation Avenues: mainly based on 'virtual activism' forming 'virtual communities', active online and working on a large network of virtual engagement. They label themselves as CSOs as well.
- 3) Formally structured CSOs who are influenced to a certain degree with the political situation.

c. Conceptualizing donors' community

The donors community is also a key player in the ecosystem to their contribution and reinforcement of various CSOs through their funding and capacity building programs. They are acting to strengthen the value of information sharing, project implementation, and have a big role in financially supporting institutional plans (Barsoum, 2016). Through their activities, the public institutions of Tunisia will be able to heighten collaboration between institutions and citizens while improving the social cohesion and helping to create a more inclusive society, better integrated for youth.

Chapters II: Youth Inclusion; an Objective or a Project

II.1. Key challenges for youth inclusion

This section coming before the findings to give more context about the concept of youth inclusion in general. It will also help contextualizing civil society in Tunisia. It will set the context frame and the background of youth and their inclusion in Tunisia. Contrasting it between being an objective hard or possible to reach their full immersion and in between having it as a pre tailored project, already set but the development partners. This section will shed light on the different fluctuations in perception when we talk about youth inclusion in general. The themes covered varies from the handpicking and the selective inclusion, the fragility of the relationships between the different ecosystem components.

a. Inclusion and exclusion of youth

The uprisings were a considerable opportunity in at least generating a stable flow of policy reforms that are based on the idea of individuals governing themselves (Hatit, 2013; Cordova, 2019, pp.337-335). This rhetorical renaissance of civil society organizations was put at the renewed policies of development for the European Union (EU) vis a vis its southern neighbors (OECD, 2017). These policies were already executed by the dictatorial regimes who handpicked the class to benefit from the promoted strategies and usually were crafted for them.

After the revolutions, policies have established alternative ties to support local elites. In his article, Mustafa Tagma (2013) highlighted a ‘bottom-up’ empowerment approach adopted by focusing on CSOs, division of labor, movement of capital, and individual-level penetration.

Barsoum (2018) revealed that these programs are usually under-funded with outdated service replicas and design flaws. Tainturier (2016) conducted ethnographic research and interviewed several local CSOs in Tunisia from the south. His study findings revealed that benefitting from these international programs and getting funds is not sufficient to assume that these youth led organizations to be fully included institutionally and to fully build their capacity.

İşleyen (2014) compared Tunisia and Egypt's institutional reforms policies. Joint capacity building projects picture citizens as a resource to be employed to realize individual and societal development. These projects by the EU aim at responding to the local needs and intimately to adapt to them in their projects. In the analyses, the researcher highlights the technical language coming with such projects. The selection, execution, and evaluation contribute to the one size

fitting all. There are differences in the objectives and unquestioned linkage between how realistic and inclusive these projects are to everyone.

In their qualitative studies, Meddeb (2017; Súilleabháin Y. M., 2020) highlighted the mistrust that the youth from East and West cities and provinces have in terms of regional equality under the previous regime. Aftermath of the Tunisian revolution, youth's expectations for the state to eliminate these disparities were raised. Vopli (2016) described the behavior of citizens themselves after the uprising as "challenging the rules and taking the law into their own hands" (Volpi, Local (R)evolutions in Tunisia: Reconstructing Municipal Political Authority, 2016). That generated a different reaction from the institutions that were suffering for decades from filthy practices amid the lack of the infrastructure and environmental set. Describing the consequences of this, Volpi, (2016) quoted:

.. Created frictions that undermined the efficiency of the new system. Citizens who had expected a rapid change in their material condition were disappointed by what they saw generically as "bad" governance (Volpi, Local (R)evolutions in Tunisia: Reconstructing Municipal Political Authority, 2016).

Cordova (2019) highlighted the causal link between the inability of institutions to involve, to contain youth in the policy dialogue, and the inability of the new and old elites- high class of politicians to safely manage a democratic political post-revolutionary transition. That produced an ambiguous outcome, away from the democratic substantial reforms needed. This division in the Tunisian society whether on the political, class, and social level heated political debates from the public proposals received (Maboudi, 2020). Koyro (2014) argued that these exchange interactions between youth and institutions failed due to the inability of youth to formalize and to translate their networks and needs in a solid format to base their self-consciousness into longer term, sustainable organizations that can channel their concepts of citizenship.

b. Between trust and fragility

Scholars e.g. (Mansouri, 2020; Abdelrahman, 2013; Zemni, 2015) broke down the influencing factors of CSOs via- a vis the policies and youth themselves. The findings

highlighted the negative impact and proportional relationship between the current governance opposition faced and the fragility of their own stand.

Mansouri (2020) explained these relationships in his research. Youth resigned from political activities as their trust in officials and institutions abated. Consequently, the level of trust declined in the political class and generally in the democratic path. Their different case studies carried on throughout Tunisia and Egypt showed a general unsolid background and a general struggle to make sense of the fresh electoral setting. The minimal or no communication between political elites and the public, especially among youths, has increased political distrust (Zemni, 2015; Mansouri, 2020; Abdelrahman, 2013; Boukhars, 2015).

This fragility and insecurity in engaging with the political class and with public institutions equally was counter balanced by various trials to include youth in the reformal process, emancipation programs through institutional initiatives, and open discussions with the public. Zemni (2015) identified the contributive efforts of the government to ensure that political institutions remain on the top of the general process' continuity. This process is considered exclusive by and to youth, vulnerable groups, and active units. Hence, the United Nations (UN) conducted a survey over the Arab region's countries measuring the degree of youth's involvement in decision-making processes. The results showed that most of the youth voted for not having enough real, inclusive opportunities vis-versa not having enough trust in the governmental entities to effectively listen to their voices. At the same time, the report specifically mentioned that youth give much more credibility to organizations than to any political figure (United Nations Inter-Agency Network, 2013).

Meddeb (2017) explained this tendency of youth to give more credibility to CSOs rather than to their elected institutional representatives. In his research on how Tunisia benefited from the support of the international programs offered by the European Union; the research showed that governors tend to favor certain sectors over the development one in a worry about their career and that is why they tend to favor one project over the other. Sayed (2020) further elaborated other reasons for the failure of institutions to meet youth's needs, attributing it to the fragility of state institutions and the lack of adequate skills and infrastructure in both the civil society and the institutions themselves. Sayed described these relationships as fluctuating

between ‘society- centered’ forms - where civil society has a powerful stand over institutions. And in between ‘institutions- centered’ forms - where the leadership have an upper hand and an influential status creating a complex dynamic leading to no effective plans (2020).

Abdelrahman (2013; Zemni, 2015) investigated this vertical, authoritarian relationship by studying the Tunisian and the Egyptian contexts simultaneously in a comparative case. Their studies commonly justified the deep division in their organizational structures making them easy to manipulate and to take over. The council’s limited legitimacy along with their limited resources and co-facilitated the slow path of making decisions and of acting in the local administration (Volpi, 2016). As he mentioned “The councils’ limited legitimacy combined with their limited resources and support from the state administration ensured that local political actors were often unable or unwilling to act decisively in the face of conflicting social demands” (Volpi, *Local (R)evolutions in Tunisia: Reconstructing Municipal Political Authority*, 2016).

Kubicek (2014; Fethi, 2020, Meddeb, 2017) highlighted other explanatory factors to this division and lack of unification such as regional disparities, class divisions, and elites' apparition. Equally, Tainturier explained this through methodical intimidations and authoritarianism of the expelled as the process of emancipation did not involve only youth (2016). Elders also took part of the marches whether formally or informally bringing another generational perspective to their demands: “NGOs creation was not only in the hands of seniors since some of the young rioters set out to organize themselves by using formal means “(Tainturier, 2016). In evaluating the absenteeism of institutions in conversations with the CSOs in Egypt and Tunisia, Abdelrahman (2013) highlighted that it is a mutual approach. CSOs, on the other hand, carried on the absence of a formal organizational body to be a potent assembling key point and wanted only to have the voice for them.

İşleyen (2015; Mansouri, 2020) assessed the capabilities of the public institutions in the post-revolutionary countries. They emphasized on the fragile structure of the technical regulations, hampering the growth prospects. In addition, the scarcity in institutional skills and unsatisfactory performance led to the creation of barriers to competition in regional and international manners and most importantly internally. Institutions became too weak to enforce any central decision of even taking the initiative to implement or propose suggestions to the central government (Hamza, 2017).

Kubicek (2013) studied the general framework that worked as an alternative of the political parties for a more sustainable and stable relationship between youth and their represented institutions. Revolutions were spontaneous and not the result of a formal transitory election process. Kubicek analyses the case of Tunisia and Egypt– like the other countries of the MENA region do not share the same economic and social features for that building and shifting public institutions’ orientations to purely ‘from scratch’ is a process that opens a risky creation of new authoritarian governments and the periphery regions.

Abdelrahman (2013) analyzed donors’ discourses on the Egyptian active society, and its ongoing process of transformation, the challenge of neutrality was at the core when selecting beneficiaries. In her case studies, the sampled groups were outside formal political institutions, and independently active trying to renegotiate state power. Thus, her research concluded that these CSOs ended up becoming active in the political sphere hampering the trust discourses and the confidence between partners due to the old regime compromising practices.

II.2. Priority areas and global narratives

a. Inefficient efforts

Meddeb (2020) described the EU's interest in the two first revolutionary examples as not new and donors have always been supporting twinning both countries. Tunisia specifically had no other case in terms of support received from international partners since the uprising and the flow of donations was satisfying: “money is not the problem” (Meddeb, 2017). Despite being recipients of generous donations and capital flows from international financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, there are no tightened coordination mechanisms between the international partners (Meddeb, 2020).

Volpi (2015) however argued in his research that this flow of resources of money will be diminishing as soon as less foreign donors will be interested in providing funds and that CSOs will face being left without a budget. These issues with the funding are reflagged more and more and so some CSOs are creating unsustainable habits in budget spending which are accused of being unequally distributed (Volpi, Political developments in Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia, 2015). Many organizations will cease to operate without the lack of funds, and this is perceived

as a positive move as it will ‘filter’ the market from ‘inefficient’ CSO members perceived as talkative rather than active (Volpi, 2015).

b. Communication gap

Halit Mustafa Tagma (2013) underlined that the new institution-building policies should encourage inclusive economic growth and development. They should be unbuilt upon agreed policy objectives that meet the mutual aspirations and serve countries’ interests. Hence, highlights the existing gap between the policy vision and the local expectations and needs-when adapted to local contexts.

Barsoum (2018; Volpi, 2016; Koyro, 2014) highlighted the double standards approach in discourse mandating. Exemplary by Volpi is Füle’s speech to the European Parliament given in 2011 addressing the unmatching between their alignment with the old oppressive regimes without a real implementation of development efforts (2016):

We must show humility about the past. Europe was not vocal enough in defending human rights and local democratic forces in the region. Too many of us fell prey to the assumption that authoritarian regimes were a guarantee of stability in the region (Füle, 2011)

This difference in the visions and needs is also prominent as a generational gap. The elders who are having the power in their hands, are slower and love bureaucracy (Tainturier, 2016).

c. Pre-tailored norms

Meddeb (2017) labeled this surge in discourses as a deep mea culpa in the history of the EU and the general community of donors. As a result, the EU vowed to revisit its bottom-up approach and impose prêt-à-porter solutions. In their comparative case between the Moroccan and the Tunisian EU involvement, Anna Khakee & Ragnar Weilandt (2021) found that there are differences in policy areas that EU are, were, and will be supporting. Policies fitting the so called ‘right type of norms’ that:

Deliver and align with their perception and strategy for civil society organizations and inputs in the regional level as expressed’ a desire to make civil society organizations more able implementers of EU projects (Anna Khakee & Ragnar Weilandt, 2021)

These projects and streams of funds analyses showed that these projects seemed to be providing more of a ‘shopping lists’ in lieu of well-defined and budgeted strategies till today Meddeb (2020). The role of elites, interest groups, media, and civil society organizations in the process of constitutional bargain is undeniable Maboudi (2020). Comparing with the old regime’s practices, Koyro ‘s qualitative study explained how previously the old regime was working with selected CSOs who had certain capacities of budget proposals and those CSOs were the ones benefiting from secured funds from the EU (2014). Smaller and less professionalized groups like the ones in rural areas struggled to meet those bureaucratic conditions, thus hindered from any access to funds and to expand locally.

Kubicek (2013) addressed also in their research the EU’s shift in narratives and strategies opened a new chapter far more engaged with promoting democratization than when it cooperated with the authoritarian regimes. Hence, the EU efforts are still looked down on and even seen as inadequate by the civil society actor focus, promoting concepts such as ‘civic virtue’, and critical ‘consciences’, ‘youth civic engagement’(Meijer, 2015). Anna Khakee & Ragnar Weilandt (2021) analyzes the EU justification to this by the existing imbalance between the needs and wants. They develop more on the donors’ passive attitude while listening to civil society concerns. Drawing upon the studies of consulting firms which end up uncritically being perceived supporting the EU donor’s strategy rather than providing objective analysis.

Koyro (2014) contrasts the orientation of the EU politics on CSOs and on fostering their cooperation, with how they are still repeatedly state – centered where the implementation of the programs was exclusively, co- ownership and closely monitored by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and closely monitored by the Ministry of the Interior. Development agencies discourses was impactful in democracy promotion efforts of the in Tunisia and Morocco. The tendency of including the civil society actors is becoming a ‘BuzzWord’ from the EU participants in recent years. Ragnar Weilandt (2021; Hamza Meddeb, 2017) emphasized the Tunisia case where civil society is seen as an ally to democratic transition. This inclusion is often conducted also through a more personal relationship between the donor’s representatives and activists in informal interactions.

OECD (2017) reported that cooperating with Tunisian institutions including with civil society group to work with and to support. This preference from the EU donors to prefer state-centered cooperation was described as a cause of mistrust among CSOs. Tunisia played a major role in the region that Europe should grasp its economy and social dynamics for long-term stability. Mansouri (2020) illustrated this trust as a “in key political institutions is vital in any democracy, a nascent one, as trust is a key condition for bolstering the legitimacy of a democratic regime, even if it is faced with challenges” (Mansouri, 2020).

In their description of the relationship between the civil society and youth inclusion in citizenship life, Khakee & Weilandt echoed the strong stress of the European donors on involving the Tunisian civil society in the matters they are concerned about and even on the larger negotiations (2021). Thus, these negotiations and ‘consultations’ from the government side and the donors are usually considered ‘window-dressing’ by the civil society actors involved due to their strong force in mobilizing youth. In his interviews with some activists as well as negotiators from the donors’ community (Khakee & Weilandt, 2021).

Anna Khakee & Ragnar Weilandt (2021) described the EU presence in the form of gatherings in meetings format where representatives from the donor’s community explaining to activists and CSOs what they intend to do and their projects in general without a genuine openness to their concerns and feedbacks in a ‘one size fits all’ approach and ‘info session’ format.

Contrarily to that, Ragnar Weilandt (2021) described in his qualitative study these gatherings as being very critical to understand the nature of the ecosystem as these local CSOs have stronger ties with the people and Tunisian matters. Developing on that, Mathieu Rousselin (2017) stated that EU delegations are usually misunderstood or misrepresented causing high mistrust and concerns like patronizing and patterning.

Anna Khakee & Ragnar Weilandt (2021) diagnosed the implications of this shift in global narratives and its impact on the CSOs industry, creating more job opportunities for young talented youth from different areas. This, by instituting the NGO industry, turned the sphere from a strong resistance where the street had a strong voice, to a reasonable, salaried, nine to five job rather than a true challenge to the system and its bodies.

(Tainturier, 2016) analyses of the regional case studies highlighted the results of this orientation. Making civil society depolarized and limited to implementing only the agendas and preferences of donor states and organizations. Turning civic engagement from idealist calling

into an attractive career path. The involvement in civic life equipped these organizations with the know-how skills through volunteering giving them more legitimacy which they take in a prestigious way leveraging up their identity.

Chapter III. Literature Review

The primary read of the relevant literature related to the topic of this thesis was made to have an initial understanding of the context of the theme, and to create a basic knowledge base that would contribute to facilitating and supporting the discussion and the further analyses. The researcher had a preliminary overview of the topic covered in the literature related to youth inclusion and the role of actively engaged youth in civil society organizations, their participation in translating their aspirations within the institutional framework, youth empowerment, youth participation, youth organizations, youth policies, the regional discourse of the community of donors and the International Organizations' role.

The literature reviewed for this research is divided into three thematic sections where civil society organizations (CSOs) are playing a pivotal role in: **Profiling youth- civil society organizations' dependence relationship, institutionalizing youth aspirations, and international community of donor's discourses.** The section on youth profiling- CSOs dependence relationship details the different components of this reliance connection. A general definition of actively engaged youth in the regional context and in the local one, followed up by a definition of institutional reforms and Inclusion, and lastly of CSOs. The section will also study the perception of youth whether a challenge or an opportunity, and what are their needs. A third part will investigate the role of CSOs' as a translator of these demands.

The second part on institutionalizing youth aspirations discusses literature on assessing the public institutions' capacities, the CSOs and youth–state relationship, and the challenges faced in the translation of these youth priorities. By outlining the general framework of youth inclusion in Tunisia as the main case and to a lesser extent in other countries of the Middle East and North Africa region. This part will also highlight some of the major efforts and contributions to institutionalize these demands at the local Tunisian level.

The last part will be discussing the role of international organizations in affecting the reform process, their role in the establishment of the mechanism or the institutional framework that supports the inclusion of youth aspirations in the national public policy process, and the challenges faced. And lastly, how these discourses are shaping in one way or the other the efforts to include youth.

The literature was analyzed chronologically. The existing literature prior to the uprising till recently- end of 2019. The time frame of the literature review was conducted for over a year. The literature covered a wide range of journal articles, political reports, and books from online and offline sources (libraries, governmental websites, CSOs, networks, and governmental institutions- mainly the ministry of youth and labor).

III.1. Civil society and youth

III.1.1. Actively engaged youth, CSOs, and institution's definitions

a. Civil society and actively engaged youth definition

After the wave of demonstrations in the Middle East and North Africa region, there was a renewed attention of academics, policy makers, and media outlets on the importance of reforming the Public Social Reforms to be more inclusive for youth (Barsoum, 2016; Belschner, 2021, p. 7; Koyro, 2014, p. 35). That includes the emergence of civil society organizations as a strong partner in challenging the narratives and in pushing towards reformist changes.

Civil society is defined per the United Nations (UN) as the third sector of society, along with government and business entities comprising civil society organizations and non-governmental organizations (United Nations, 2019). It is formed by citizens who deliberately have chosen to join informal interaction groups in a non-institutionalized or political way with public institutions or working in the ecosystem aiming to bring change to the existing structures through mobilization to withstand authoritarian upgrading (Koyro, 2014).

In the Tunisian context, Volpi (2015; Affan, 2021, 3) presented another definition of CSOs through their role historically as an active mass of power:

Either a state-constrained entity or an outlawed vehicle of opposition. Despite heavy co-optation of the Tunisian General Labor Union (UGTT) and Association Tunisienne des Femmes Démocrates (ATFD), groups such as the Tunisian Forum of Economic and Social Rights (FTDES) stayed militant and underground. This is not to say that they were ineffective. Tunisia has an historical tradition of activism and political engagement that predates and proceeded throughout Ben Ali's reign where institutions such as the Tunisian National Lawyers Order (ONAT) has a track record of resistance to unfavorable government policy. This pre-existing legacy of organized non-governmental grouping helped enable effective and coordinated civic action in the uprisings.

Furthermore, these pre-existing civil traditions have facilitated the rapid development of the new post-revolutionary civil society (Volpi et al. 2015, p. 23).

Bauer (2015) contrarily emphasized that the role that civil society plays is more of a hamper rather than a booster of positive change in the MENA context. More specifically, he identified the role of CSOs as a subtle and observable secondary one rather than a changemaker (Bauer, 2015). Opposed to other scholars, in defining the role of civil society, Tainturier (2016) described the civic engagement through NGOs as an empowering process. Aiming for better economic and social inclusion rather than to challenge power and domination structures.

Fethi (2020; Koyro, 2014) conducted different comparative case studies between the Arab World and related his results to the Tunisian context. Focusing on the post-uprising era, their research respectively showed that, in massive social movements, it is not only the CSOs who were the ones ahead, nor were they the leaders of changes. In these social movements, active youth and the hard-to-reach ones were prominently present. Hence, not under the umbrella of an organization rather than in personal capacity, individually representing their demands. The common expectation in the Arab world is that CSOs with their civically engaged youth, and political actors to be the ones leading the uprisings. The perception of individual civically engaged youth as ‘sub-citizens’ explicates their demands for ‘dignity’ during the Arab Springs’ demonstrations.

Cavatorta explained this emergence of a new category leading the social transformation in Tunisia. The rise of new civil society actors that see themselves as part of a movement rather than a particular organization. Youth activists, female campaigners for women’s rights, as well as individuals engaged in the protests utilized the internet, and in particular social media sites, to encourage change in Tunisia (2012).

In describing the motives of CSOs to be active, Volpi (2015) stated that they are not trying to win power despite their support for the political deadlock. He analyzes the case of Tunisia back 2015 when the four largest and oldest CSOs: the Tunisian Human Rights League (LTDH), ONAT, the Tunisian Union of Industry, Trade and Crafts (UTICA) and UGTT, collectively also known as the ‘The Quartet’, played a vital role in overcoming this deadlock by establishing a national dialogue that happened in Tunisia after the associations. The role of civil society is important in mobilizing the masses of youth. But a politicized civil society is

problematic as they should be separate from political parties (Volpi, Political developments in Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia, 2015).

b. Institutions and inclusion definitions

This section will investigate the definition of public institutions, the inclusion process of public policy, and the importance of youth participation in the public policy processes. Trying to oversee youth affairs “some countries organize youth right at the center of their government, others have a youth ministry; some have a department for youth affairs within another Ministry” (OECD, 2018, p. 12). Albeit, interpreting the global numbers; there is a noticeable lag in the participation of young people in the formal, institutional political processes in the region (United Nations Inter-Agency Network, 2013, p. 1)

Mansouri (2020) found that public institutions play a double role. As main generators of youth inclusion reforms and implementers of these reforms. The implementation process requires the involvement of other entities. Mansouri highlights that this has been a challenge in the Tunisian case despite the high level of involvement of the CSOs and the civil society in general due to the lack of real dedicated mechanisms eager to change.

Tainturier (2016) investigated the youth inclusion framework through CSOs and defined institutional inclusion as a form of legitimization process of the NGOs from their creation following the process of their development in the field of CSOs, State, and international donors.

In Tunisia, Chograni (2021) identified a failure for Tunisians even after 10 years since the revolution to activate translating their requests from protesting to exercising their active citizenship and the enthusiasm that the Arab Spring generated in its early days has now been evaporating slowly.

Public institutions remained powerless and lack agency as examined: “Political participation for the youth is considered to be less a matter of political party affiliation and more of a struggle for change through CSO activities and volunteer work, using street protests and social media to effect social change” (Mansouri, Youth and political engagement in post-revolution Tunisia, 2020, p. 7).

Volpi (2015) described the dreams of having democratization moving away from autocratic governments to embrace liberty turning into a nightmare of internal strife, social and sectarian divisions.

c. Youth and reforms definition

Youth are redirecting their voices away from the formal political process towards more local social activism. In analyzing the motives behind this shift, Chograni (2021) emphasized on the lack of real youth-targeted programs, the political alienation based on the old regime's practices, and the general disillusionment from mainstream party politics created this new tendency of youth to pursue political ways outside the traditional sphere of political participation by leading CSOs.

Mansouri (2020) described this shift to be negatively impacting the engagement with political institutions and the political processes. The elections and the implementation of the mandates. The term youth will be defined respectively by looking into the local contexts of Tunisia as the main case study and then to a lesser extent from Egypt in the second section. In Tunisia, and according to a youth policy study by EuroMed, Tunisian youths are those aged 15-29 (Sylvie Floris, 2014) and the same definition was used in the Egyptian state, per CAPMAS definition (Pierre Tainturier, 2016).

Reforms are the set of programs and strategies implemented by the institutional authorities with the aim of providing opportunities and support in the integration and inclusion into the society by empowering youth's active citizenships as agents of change (OECD, 2021; Francesco Cavatorta, 2012). In our context, youth is loomed in a more socially constructed way rather than from a demographic age frame. As defined by Mansouri in his paper:

Even this fluid characterization of youth may not reflect the prolonged period of dependence that often goes well beyond the age of 25, as young people struggle to enter the labor market and gain independence. This period of 'waithood', describes young people who have passed the age of 24 but have not yet been able to attain the social markers of adulthood, such as forming families and households, due to financial constraints linked to unemployment (Mansouri, 2020)

In another definition brought up by Meijer (2015), reforms are instruments "bringing about the virtuous circle of citizenship and achieving a new social contract that is the basis of accountability and democracy, but also of stability and security" (Meijer, 2015). The main role of these reforms can be directed to change and boost the political, economic, and social systems replacing all the tribalism, authoritarianism, and sectarian divisions. Creating a system based on citizenship rights and duties. The author focused on the Tunisian case and how after the uprising

many of these reforms were not implemented, sometimes reversed, left split amid the social and political divisions. These reforms are boosters for youth inclusion to actively engage in civic life (Meijer, 2015).

In this study, the term inclusion will be mostly derived from empowerment and its relatives as it has progressively been evolving. On a general scope of definition, Tainturier, described inclusion's goal as: "To designate individual capacities to better act within a given system and has become embedded in the institutional order of development" (Pierre Tainturier, 2016).

United Nations (2009) defined inclusion as emancipation, which, as a search for equality. Interpreting that, civic society participation reinforces active citizenship and promotes a more integral and inclusive social system. The measurement of youth inclusion is performed through the assessment of their development and empowerment. As per the UN Sustainable Development Goals indicators there are 68 indicator providing information, directly or clearly, relevant to youth development (DESA, UN).

Koyro (2014) stressed on the international community's role especially the European Union (EU) in reshaping these trajectories by not limiting their support to only financial means rather than offering a space for training on basic skills such as management, budgeting, fundraising etc. Otherwise, the new instruments will lack the ability to sustain or to offer the required impact esteemed by the European civil society Cooperation.

III.1.2. Youth inclusion today

In his comparative case of Tunisia, Egypt, and Morocco analyzing the social agents of change, (Volpi, 2015) highlighted that the social mobilization in these countries should not be read as anti-regime for calling out for reforms that are absent since ages. Neither as against the state. Contrarily, he perceives it as a form of confronting radicalism of the state institutions even if these three countries took different trajectories.

The emergence of CSOs as mobilizers is not in this context perceived as a counter-power for redefining the state balance or to take the state's power. The qualitative study of Volpi (2015) showed that, in contrast, these youth movements are stimulated with the demand to have stronger and greater relationships with the state and society, to be more responsive to what society needs and aspires for.

Belschner (2021) focused their argument on granting youth more freedom to be included in the various aspects of civic life is crucial for their inclusion. Thus, in their research, they argued that this representation should be also contained in a broad way to the disadvantageous youth category as the main moderator and active agents sparking the revolutions (Belschner, The adoption of youth quotas after the Arab uprisings, 2021). That led to the expansion of new waves of civic networks and grassroots organizations from charities to development ones led by these dedicated youth (Pierre Tainturier, 2016).

Thus, the perception of youth and of their active involvement had another side facet. The research of Tainturier, (2016) showed these youth have an immense power which can be turned out and manipulated. (Belschner, 2021) expressed a similar argument in her research, quoting one of the interviewees: “The youth are dangerous, they can ‘explode’. States have always been afraid of that social category” (Belschner, the adoption of youth quotas after the Arab uprisings, 2021), they only criticize, and they are restless (Tainturier, 2016).

Tainturier (2016) acknowledges the role of CSOs as containers and an alternative space for these youth to incubate their social problems and overcome partisan struggles and personal ambitions pushing towards dealing with real problems affecting the citizens.

III.1.3. Civil society mobilizer role

a. Translators of meanings

In the light of the uprisings in the region, the later transitions were known for redefining social contracts (Pierre Tainturier, 2016). Belschner (2021) analyses the contrast of these old omissions of youth in the decision-making process and in shifting the institutional strategies. CSOs today are more satisfying; their emancipation mission is relatively new in the MENA region as their political and civil society representation was absent from the domestic debates (Belschner, The adoption of youth quotas after the Arab uprisings, 2021).

There is a strong dependence and inter-changing discourses between CSOs and youth to translate their demands to various social and economic public requests. The United Nations agency network points out the requirements of reaching a meaningful youth participation and leadership. Young people and young people-led organizations should have opportunities, capacities, and benefit from an enabling environment and relevant evidence-based programs and policies at all levels (United Nations Inter-Agency Network on Youth, 2013, p. 2).

Independent youth activism is not organized according to formal, institutional groupings, the reliance on CSOs becomes important as they can limit the agglomeration of powers of the government and other elites to whom the politic and associative life was dominated a ‘traditional bourgeoisie’ structured along secular and liberal tendencies -from the left and from the right (United Nations Inter-Agency Network, 2013; Koyro, 2014; Volpi, 2016). Non-state actors are playing a significant role in the field of promoting youth inclusion for progress in Egypt, Tunisia, and Lebanon (Ghada Barsoum, 2018; OECD, 2018).

Tainturier (2016) describes CSOs as non-state actors who have gained legacy from their commitment to serve their local communities and regions. This formed a holistic concept that covered all sectors of public action. Other scholars eg. Volpi (2016; Meijer, 2015) mentioned that these official local actors were not necessarily the ones who had led the anti-regime protests. Volpi described the civil society as:

A motley crew of young revolutionaries who would soon be blaming these institutionalized actors and the politicians for stealing ‘their revolution’ questioning and no longer accepting authority without questioning (Volpi, 2016)

On the other hand, Meijer (2015) emphasizes that CSOs got involved in some cases but were not leading the Arab uprisings and their role was minor:

In Egypt, Tunisia, and Jordan professional organizations such as the Lawyers’ syndicate, the Judges Club, and the Doctors’ Union played an important role in preparing the ground for the uprisings, either through ideas of equality, democracy, and human rights, or as locations where cross-ideological, cross-sectarian coalitions were formed. In Tunisia and Egypt, trade unions would play an important role during the uprisings (Meijer, 2015)

b. Government’s role

Post revolutions time in the region is substantially contesting the new political order and apparent divergence of outcomes in terms of political transactions (Mansouri, 2020). That period's strength was primarily due to broad-based public participation and civic engagement of individual/collective youth-centered groups affecting meaningful and sustainable social transformations (United Nations, 2014; Barsoum, 2018).

In their mixed qualitative and quantitative studies to generate semi-structured interviews, (Mansouri, 2013; Volpi, 2016) highlighted that participation in civil activities reinforced active

citizenship and promoted cohesion among youth vis a vis their respective representatives through the dedicated public institutions facilitating the dialogue with the state administration. Defeating the filthy old marginalization of considering them as ‘sub-categories’.

Anna Khakee & Ragnar Weilandt (2021) emphasized the role that CSOs played as a space between state, market, and family where they try to shape the rules, the specific policies, and other aspects of social life.

Súilleabháin (2020) developed on that idea of ‘check and balance’ between the civically engaged youth and the institutions, monitoring not only the performance but also the legislature by asking for structural changes boosting their inclusion. They also examined in their article how included and empowered Tunisians Youth build resilient capacities through state and civil society formation. Contrasting that in the MENA region, Tunisia is an immense agora where public protests are legion. Successive governments and institutions could not translate the wants of the citizens. as he described it “*Tunisia became a polity of citizens without a state*” (Súilleabháin, 2020). Developing on that, Boukhars, (2015) pointed out the generational gap and the struggle to find the jobs and opportunities they need is a prominent factor.

Tainturier (2016) explained that rejection of politics and of collective action of any politicized group since political parties are judged as morally corrupt, being too preoccupied with power. That shifted their reliance on the informal institutions such as free media and vibrant civil society which were in contrast absent in the past. This is particularly relevant for young Tunisians from the working-class context who lean on social capital as the only form of capital that they own and that they could freely transfer their needs to challenging hegemony (Cordova, 2019).

c. Containers of aspirations

Contrarily to this reliance on civil society organizations as a replacement of Governmental Institutions. In the Tunisian context, Maboudi (2020) highlighted the fear of Ennahda party from the liberalization tendencies and pushed for more public opinion pressure assuming they would be more sympathetic with their ideology. Maboudi described civil society as “*not representative of all the people, therefore, for constitutional issues, public engagement is*

necessary because most people do not find themselves represented in associations and organizations” (Maboudi, 2020).

Maboudi analyzed the participation of CSOs in the public fora. CSOs did not strategically send their active youthfully engaged members to steer and to develop conversations with youth public institutions; rather than, they participated in round tables, and conferences where they had experts debating their inclusion (2020). Quoting Koyro: *“The hope that civil society could act as a democratizing force soon proved unrealistic, or at best considerably exaggerated”* (Koyro, 2014).

III.2. Institutions and youth mobilization through CSOs

III.2.1. Youth institutional framework

Meijer (2015) conducted a qualitative study of the legal framework of NGOs in Egypt, Jordan, and Morocco after the Tunisian uprising. Her findings revealed that the emergence of new laws has freed Tunisian NGOs from state interference to an unheard-of degree. Decree 88 allowed NGOs to obtain funds from foreign donors and to play political roles. “By the end of 2011, 1,200 NGOs had been registered; at the end of 2012, their number had grown to some 2000” (Meijer, 2015). The integration of NGOs to power was facilitated by the established open parliamentary system reassuring a mediator role afterwards in Tunisia:

Law No. 2011-88 of 24/9/2011 provided clear requirements and protection in a new legal framework that had not previously been afforded to civil society organizations. This law created a context in which organizations could operate by guaranteeing the freedom to form and to join associations, and to organize activities. It strengthened the role and the development of civil society in addition to respecting its independence.

Article 3 of Law 88 encourages major principles of civil political culture: democracy, plurality, transparency, equality, and human rights, while Article 4 prevents political incivility by prohibiting associations from adopting by laws that call for any incitement for violence, hatred, fanaticism, or discrimination of religious, racial, or regional grounds (Volpi, Political developments in Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia, 2015, p. 22)

Globalization, the regional social movements, and the economic challenges put the Tunisian authorities under the need to reconsider their youth institutional framework due to youth absenteeism and lower active rates of involvement in civic life (Mansouri, 2020). Institutional approaches are becoming more common after the Arab uprisings, rebuilding state legitimacy and institutions, thus (Mansouri, 2020; Volpi, 2015; Vopli, 2016) re named this

approach as ‘over- stating’; when the Arab state emphasizes on the individual role that CSOs played in checking the power of the state and steering the Tunisian transition.

Volpi (2015) perceived actions and movements as a valuable source of shaping policies rather than only criticizing the government by becoming a cooperative partner with the government:

Certain CSOs that were active prior to the revolution need to change from their ‘against the state’ approach to civil society work. Arguably, this has been due to the ‘you’re with us or against us’ mentality. civil society can overwhelm the state with demands (Volpi, Political developments in Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia, 2015).

Analyzing the narratives of youth inclusion through CSOs after the revolution, Tainturier (2016) described the post-revolutionary institutional era to agree with the liberal legislation related to political and civil rights. And in a massive run from the international donors and organizations supporting the democratic transition in Tunisia. Tainturier explained:

Youth participation has also been valued as a core principle and objective that ought to drive policies. This has resulted in a new wave of civic, charities and development organizations, led by or dedicated to youth, from grassroots to national networks (Pierre Tainturier, 2016)

Maboudi (2020) conducted both statistical empirical study of the content of public proposals and the existing constitutional drafts as well as interviews with Tunisian constitution drafters. 43% of these public proposals were included in the draft constitution. Results showed a positive relationship between the popularity of a citizen proposal and its likelihood of becoming a constitutional provision leading to a democratic constitutional outcome. Parralely, Maboudi, highlighted the support of the international community of donors or political affiliation in the emancipation process leading to a better intermediate role in the public arenas (2020).

In their research on the partnership role of the EU commission in the region and their new tendencies and discourses, Koyro (2014) described a new approach of the EU. Partnership with people with more emphasis on the CSOs’ component, contrarily to how it used to be from the bottom up. The emphasis on the dialogue between all civil society components, helped transmit their needs and equipping the EU and the international cooperation to address these issues on the ground. The study acknowledged the mistrust and pejorative perception of the youth inclusion efforts in civic life as expressed: “*The aim of the EU and other international donors should be to*

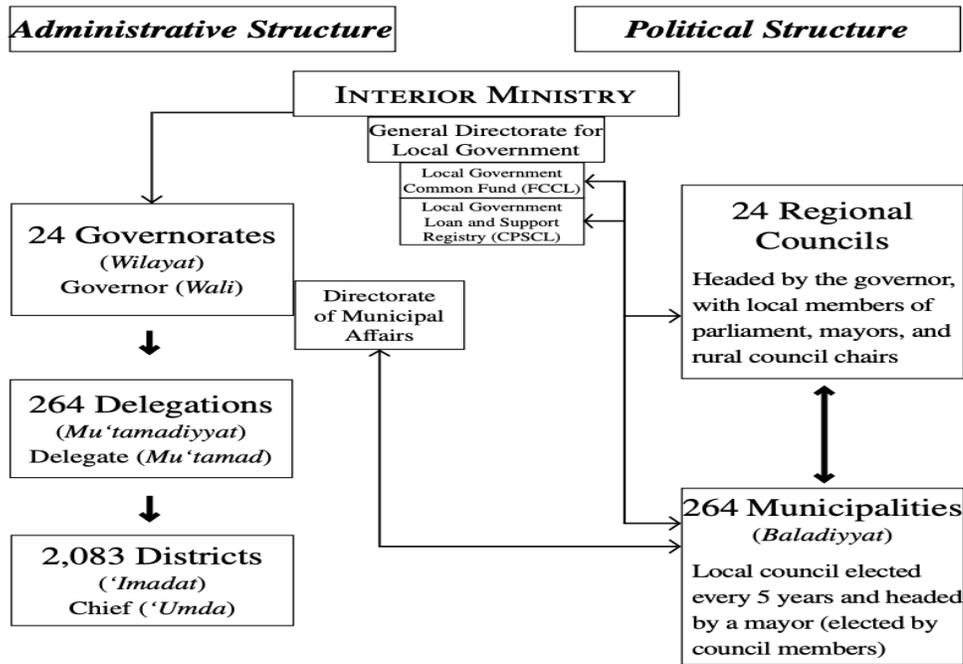
facilitate this dialogue, not to take sides” (Koyro, 2014). Volpi identified the grassroots of the trends of local democracy in Tunisia and developed that this projected top-down approach was not only from the international community and partners but also from the institutionalist local structures (2016).

Tainturier (2016) highlighted that to ensure a full initialization of youth’s demands, their participation has to be inclusive. Tunisia is considered a success story as all the active key role players; the institutional and political limitations to pluralism were progressively lifted.

According to Belschner (2021) there is a growing interest from the international donors to support the introduction of the quota system in the parliament boosting youth’s active participation in public life and reintegrating them in the national projects. The study’s findings showed that these quotas were included during the last phase H3 of the political transition after the adoption of the constitution and during the compilation of the electoral code. The introduction of this quota percentage by the deputies was perceived largely as a satisfactory approach to the international community of donors and partners and not out of conviction (Belschner, The adoption of youth quotas after the Arab uprisings, 2021).

In his description of the governance system in Tunisia prior to the uprising, Volpi (2016) highlighted a bottom-up approach where the lowest level of the pyramid is the ‘Umda’. He is working along with an extensive hierarchical and bureaucratic structure going all to the minister of interior. He simultaneously holds a political role, produces a patronage network evaluating the socioeconomic needs of the local community, and benefiting those ‘deserving’ individuals and families. His study describes this structure as unchanged after the revolution. Going up to the other structures of (mu‘tamadiyya) and the governorate (wilaya) where they are at the nexus between the different local sections of national administrations and the ones to be approached to obtain any permit (*Check fig 1*). Coordinating those tasks with the different parties involved and facilitating the process is done through a delegate (Volpi, 2016). In the aftermath of the revolution, Volpi (2016) describes the ‘new’ social forces including old civil society actors (unions, Human Right associations, leftist organizations, and established opposition politicians) and new civil society actors (Ennahda activists, Salafis, and revolutionary leagues).

Figure I.



21. Houda Laroussi, *Micro-crédit et lien social en Tunisie: La solidarité instituée* [Micro-Credit and Social Cohesion in Tunisia: Established Solidarity] (Tunis: Institut de recherche sur le Maghreb contemporain, 2009); Amin Allal and Florian Kohstall, "Opposition within the State: Governance in Egypt, Morocco, and Tunisia," in *Contentious Politics in Middle East: Political Opposition under Authoritarianism*, ed. Holger Albrecht (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2010), pp. 181–204.

Figure 1: Administrative and Political structures in Tunisia
 Source: (Volpi, *Local (R)evolutions in Tunisia: Reconstructing Municipal Political Authority*, 2016)

Chapter IV: Research Methodology

a. Qualitative research design and sampling

The data included in this study builds in-depth interviews conducted over the course of six months with a total number of 30 participants. The age parameters set for the research were between 22 and 35 years of age depending on the group category of the interviewee. Interviews were conducted with active youth, an umbrella term for young people who may not necessarily be activists but who are engaged on one level or another in community work. CSOs' active members who joined these organizations after the uprising, experts and academics in the field, and active donors representatives in the Tunisian landscape.

The actively engaged youth category is the focus of the study. The results showed that these active young youth have a base of similar civil features – they were at some point or are still independently involved in the Tunisian civil society. Some of them are no longer active in civil society and decided to step back for a while, and some had previous rehabilitation with certain institutions. The choice of these profiles is on purpose; having interviewees from different social classes, regions, and fields of studies were the variable parameters. Some left Tunisia for France and other neighboring European countries abroad, while others remained still in Tunisia. The common feature about all of them is that they are completely not involved in politics currently.

The other key condition or prerequisite for participation in the research– independent from which group they are in - was the ability to speak, with first-hand knowledge, of their experience in civil society. Interviews were inductive and the prompts allowed the participants to voice their ideas and tell their own stories. Interviewees tended to be very forthcoming when reflecting on their individual experiences and in describing very personal feelings. Much of this comes through in the report. Interviews were governed by a question bank, a copy of which is included in *Appendix one*.

The research paper uses advance in-depth qualitative research methods combining several qualitative tools that are detailed in the next section. This approach is mainly to study this topic by seeking to underline the nature of relationships and challenges between the different components: public institutions, youth, CSOs, and donors' communities to create youth inclusion. This type of study allowed to answer realistic and concrete questions for today's young population in Tunisia by translating what is heard, seen, noticed from actions and verbs

from the people, places, activities, and events with the “purpose of learning about some aspects of the social world and to generate new understandings that can be used by that social world” (Prakash Upadhyay, 2013).

A range of ethical and safety considerations was built into the study design to ensure that the identities of the participants remained confidential and that the original recordings of the interviews were destroyed once the analysis was conducted upon their knowledge.

b. Data collection

- Ethnographic Fieldwork

As the definition says, “Ethnography is the study of social interactions, behaviors, and perceptions that occur within groups, teams, organizations, and communities” (Scott Reeves, 2008, p. 337). This tool was mainly used through active participation in the field to enable the researcher to get insights and to immerse in the participants' views and actions in an unbiased, spontaneous way. Data were gathered mainly by attending with beneficiaries from funding and sponsorship programs, attending workshops and trainings , getting participants' observations, field notes, and own experiences to understand the different visions that prevail on different levels:

- The current youth policies, the practices adopted, and to collect data and opinions on donors community interventions and its variables.
- To assess youth aspirations and demands.
- To understand the dynamics and the real-life relationships between, among, and inter-agency relationships, to develop a further understanding of the background of the interviewees and the local context.

- Interviews

Interviews were used as well simultaneously during this research as a primary data resource. According to the interpretive constructivist researcher, the goal of an interview is to find out how people perceive an occurrence or object and, most importantly “the meaning they attribute to it” (Owen, 2014). They took a conversational, informal, and non-directive form. Semi-structured way to enable the researcher to ask as many questions as he/she can/want, in the

direction that favors the line of the study. Flexibility in adding up, canceling, or even adjusting questions helps the researcher get more elaboration and justification.

Between forty minutes to an hour was spent with each interviewee to ensure that they had given all relevant information. Interviewees were asked to exchange their experience, needs challenges, perceptions of the current situation in civil involvement. Questions were asked when only further clarification was needed. The active participation helped break down and obtain findings for the three levels:

- The structure and discourse of civically engaged youth
- The donor interventions with CSOs of the MENA and their vision
- The challenges to youth inclusion reforms will be the impacting challenges in each section.

Interview questions were revised to ensure that the translation allowed people to answer without hesitation and comfortably use the sub-questions. The interviews had to be in Arabic/French/English to be able to talk to a larger group of people, as this is also the most convenient and effective way to gather information in the Tunisian local context, and scripts were translated to English. Constructing the interview questions was only achieved after having a final draft of the literature review.

- **Content Analysis**

Due to the nature of the research, it was essential to have the content analysis. This tool was used as a secondary analysis of the existing: literature, journal articles, political reports, and books from online and offline sources (libraries, governmental websites, CSOs, networks, and governmental institutions- mainly the ministry of youth and labor) to extract related themes and data to the current reforms' orientations, experiences of lobbying, and limitations to implementations. And on a more minor reflection, to help "evaluate the language used within documents and conduct interviews as well to search for bias or partiality" (Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health, 2021, p. 1).

- **Sampling/Case study**

The research work looked at how institutions do or do not limit the strength of its youth. By surpassing the tenuous relationship between a robust civil society - in our case represented by its active youth and CSOs and less revolutionary violence by not offering a legal, policy framework of inclusion. Civil society is formed by active, dynamic youth in exchange

relationships with public institutions to generate reforms boosting their development and answering back sufficiently to their needed demands. They are in mutual dynamic in Tunisia mainly- with some reference to other countries from the MENA region in analysing youth policies.

In my research, I excluded university groups, unofficial groups (non-state recognized), and charity organizations. The focus will be directed to CSOs and civic engaged youth components that impact in a direct way youth and their empowerment—aiming to look at how the power and the role of CSOs as an actor of change are limited or not by institutions.

The case of Tunisia highlights the importance of having a strong CS with the ability to mediate and work through conflicts to aid in a country's progression through a revolution. These social uprisings started with the Tunisian revolution and were followed up by the Egyptian one that was not planned, centered, or organized movements rather than being youth-centered but led mainly by civil society. Both countries have similarities and conformities in their civil societies' experiences.

- **Tunisia:**

The Tunisian political scene had several social movements such as the 'workers movement' and labor unions that were theoretically in opposition to the regime. Despite the various confrontations received, they remained the main shapers of the Tunisian transition, pushing Tunisia to institutionalize diverse participatory practices before and after Ben Ali's regime. "Engaged CSOs and strong political parties helped to maintain a vibrant national dialogue process that culminated in the ratification of a widely praised new constitution, revealing Tunisian's capacity to contain its diverse population in political channels and institutions" (ESCWA, 2014, p. 13). Various NGOs and civil society groups invaded the Tunisian scene. Thus, the widely known ones are not appealing enough and most of the youth either formulate new independent groups or remain active individually in a separate way and with a full disconnection from any CSOs that are youthless. Through this research, I want to understand the challenges between this type of trust discourse, the distraction of youth in between these different units, and the public institutions' stands on that.

Taking the case study of Tunisia, a cross-country experience will forecast how progress activities can better meet the requests of youth during this period in the history of the region and under this international structural guidance. Considering that after the Arab Spring, civil society

with its active youth groups has colossal tension between the will of its young people and expressing a policy designed to target their needs eluding tensions.

c. Data analysis

Following the data collection plan, data followed the data triangulation method to assess the validity, and reliability of the findings. Triangulation facilitated data validation through cross verification from more than two sources. Testing the consistency of findings obtained through different instruments increases the chance to control, or at least to assess, some of the threats or multiple causes influencing my results (Betterevaluation, 2020). Since the gathered data are purely qualitative, the coding system is a process of identifying the items in the finding to get a meaningful link (CESSDA, 2021). Coding is the process of identifying a passage in the text or other data items, searching and remembering concepts, and finding relations between them. It will be used for all research tools with a cross analyzing, and comparison of the different collected findings.

d. Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations bound this study to be part of the researcher's responsibilities towards his scientific mission. After receiving the IRB approval on November 27th, 2021. First, making the research's nature and theme clear to the CSOs and youth involved is one of the informants' fundamental rights. That's why, the researcher explained the primary research's main purpose and identified himself before the study using consent, anonymity, and voluntary participation. . Pseudonyms were used in the presentation of data for ethical considerations for some interviewees. Those interviews later helped refine the study questions and frame the discussion guides as well as contribute to the development of key conclusions and recommendations. Worth adding- as common to qualitative research, this study does not claim sample representativeness.

e. Limitations

Three instruments were used to investigate in this research: interviews, document review, and ethnographic observations. However, The limited number of participants and the lack of a realistic gender representation might cause some limitations influencing the results. The content analysis is built to gain information about the people's past experiences with political

participation to comprehend if there has been any change with their impact on the governmental orientations, demands, aspirations, and reforms. For that, I heavily relied on snowballing method to get interviewees. Although, there was a consent form signed prior to the interview and recordings were made only if accepted. Trust challenges and the lack of an equal participation from donors' community. Other limitations were related to the limited time I worked on my paper; online resources from public institutions were limited and the interview requests were delayed and cancelled. however, I considered resorting online desk research, websites, live and online recordings which offered me the opportunity to go through the discussions.

Chapter V: Study Findings

There is an initial need to discuss the relationship dynamics perceived by CSOs and institutions. The findings are divided into four main chapters. In the upcoming sections, there will be separate chapters discussing the different relationships and challenges raised by the interviewees over the study. The understanding process included interviewing various CSOs, active youth, development partners, and relevant youth institutions to stand on the status of youth participation, challenges, and areas of improvements. The sample included a wide range of CSOs and active youth from different regions and different fields of civic engagement.

V.1. The perception of youth and CSOs on the role of the public institutions

Public institutions are the main official correspondents with youth and CSOs dealing with many social and economic challenges to solve especially post 2011. The situation becomes more sensitive yet challenging knowing that the expectations of young people are always higher and faster than the performance of these institutions. In this framework, this chapter will analyze the nature of relationship and the perceptions between institutions, youth, and CSOs. By analyzing the existing challenges causing these tenuous liaisons. These challenges vary between bureaucracy to the complexity the implementation system, the instability of the country and its red tape processes.

a. Bureaucracy and complex systems

When tapping into the implementation of processes and reforms, mentioning the challenge of bureaucracy comes up on the top of the list for interviewees and the case of Alexandre is no difference. Alexandre as his family named him, a Tunisian street artist and the co-founder of Brotherhood Art in Sousse in 2014. The organization aims at joining different communities into the same ground through artwork. Alexandre describes the current relations between public youth institutions and CSOs: *“The system needs to change; the relationship between the design and the NGOs must be more straightforward. We are artists, and we do not require complex processes”* (Maalel). In his experience, he was in constant interactions with public institutions and the various youth structures ‘Al Hayakel Al Chababya’ in any matter related to the inauguration of his NGO to any on the ground activity. Coming from the nature of the work they deliver as an organization, there is a crucial need to emerge in the administrative bubble to

perform any street Art. In describing the relationship between public institutions, youth structures, and organizations, he outlines his rigid opposition to the processes imposed:

As in the Brotherhood Art organization, we are against bureaucracy and hate administrative work. It was hard to convince our team to make the first conceptual framework papers for youth. You know! (Maalel)

Similarly, and developing on the rigid processes and the unbreakable ties imposed, Asma, 28 years old who is a board member in the Red Croissant in Mattouia's local branch. Mettaouia, a town and a commune in southeastern Tunisia, she developed when mentioning one example of hurdles despite having Red Croissant as one of big NGOs in the country: "*Procedures to get the physical space are very hard, a lot of paperwork, of procedures till you lose hope. The public process is complicated*" (Attig, 2022). This complication in the processes led to creating fluctuating relationships with institutions and local CSOs generating deception, loose contact, and aggression. Unteaching the trust and hope that were gained from the revolution. Asma added after finishing the interview on a following up note that the local institutions/ authorities- such as the municipality and the area district tended to have a centric culture and to strong willingness to get the full credits and disgracing any other stakeholder:

Local authorities like municipalities and the local district authorities do not know how to encourage CSOs at the beginning. But if a project or an initiative becomes successful, they pretend that it's theirs and get ownership even though it's us who did the job. They just like to jump in and love being at the spotlight' (Attig, 2022)

Ayman is a young activist, studied in a small coastal city called Mahdia and founded his NGO, in Jendouba, a city in the northern side of the country. Jendouba is an important crossroads with many road links to other towns. Today, he wrapped up his 28 years old, he was reflecting on his experience during university times. He was describing the different relationships between his professors and educators with students as the first institutional body to meet as a youth. They were very helpful in his small community and facilitated the creation of small clubs within his university; that was the start of his engagement. Today, he is working with the Tunisian Center for Social Entrepreneurship (TCSE). It is the first of its kind in Tunisia. The innovative board co-creates local ecosystems in Tunisia, and the center comes up with new ideas to tackle social problems while working with unemployed people in both rural and urban areas.

In parallel, he is the founder of an NGO; “Youtheon” in Jendouba with the mission to unleash the power of youth locally and to be an active actor in the community to make a change.

The NGO “Youtheon” is based on sharing experiences and exchange following a youth-to-youth modality. Their first project and most known project in his region was implemented with the National Democratic Institution and iDebate where they were recruited as local executors. Their major role was to set a common ground between the deputies in the parliament with youth in Jendouba. Capacity building to the selected youth was a part of the program, these youth were trained in debate and negotiation by ‘Youtheon’. The outcomes were presented and discussed with the deputies in a form of debate. In subsequent stages, these youth were supposed to start implementing their recommendations after being endorsed with the public institutions.

This project extended on two years starting 2020 and a lot of money was invested by international donors. Thus, as an NGO, they had no legal status to present those demands or recommendations to the parliament and the only way for them was to lean on political parties’ support as channels of transmission. The experience of Aymen is very common to a lot of NGOs, they undertake a long paper work process but then that does not guarantee their approval and they might failing or incompleting the process due to the instability and other challenges that will be mentioned in the upcoming sections. Describing the challenging process of legally initial opening his NGO from bureaucracy to long waiting lists:

Bureaucracy, please mention that a lot as a challenge! ... We launched our own organization, enough of working under people. ‘Youtheon’ was our baby. We managed to get all the approvals legally. The process was hectic back in 2019. We had several problems: how to get the municipality to approve us. How to open a bank account for the organization; all banks were avoiding CSOs for fear of money laundering. We had to do illegal ways to get the authorization (Bouazizi, 2022)

Another testimony of the rigid processes, Hamza is an active youth from Mourouj, a commune in the southern suburbs of Tunis, the capital. With other motivated youth, they wanted to inaugurate Youth Clubs in the area. Association Youth Clubs, founded in 2013, focuses on education sustainable development and today is headquartered in El Mourouj 1, Tunis, Tunisia. The association aims to ensure good education to have healthy citizens responsible and ready for professional life. Noting in their definition:

Youth Clubs bring together over 1,200 young pupils and students who belong to 54 Youth Clubs coming from 14 regions of the country. This is through the inclusion of

extracurricular activities in all schools, the training of our members in several areas (soft skills, hard skills, advocacy ...) wishing to improve education in Tunisia, to have a better country² (Internet Society, 2022)

Despite having looser tights on NGOs and their creations and the boom of CSOs that civil society witnessed, it is still raising several complex questions. In the case of Hamza, the organization was opened by others from another local community within the same area back in 2016 as a branch of his local high school. In describing the challenges faced in his attempt, which ultimately ended up failing:

The only possible way for them to open it up was through the local Youth Center “Maison des Jeunes” and not through high school, and we were only high school students, no options at that time (Mahjoubi, 2022)

Hamza pointed out in his experience to the lack of trust and the rigid relationship between the Youth Centers and youth initiators themselves. In asking about those requirements, he highlighted the need to have everyone endorsing you to be able to move. They needed to have the high school officially endorsing them and having them as incubators by offering spaces for meetings and activities. But, opposed to their thoughts, their high school refused “*Our high school refused to be part of this. A big responsibility for them*” (Mahjoubi, 2022).

The bureaucratic sphere governing the public institutions processes and their reluctance to take any responsibility when interacting with youth before 2011 and the following years affected the trust towards the credibility of the governmental initiatives and its institutions that are supposed to be dedicated to serve youth and to make sure that their demands and needs are locally ensured and satisfied. The interviewees shared that after participation in the revolution of January 2011 many youths suffered from burnout including himself and withdrawal from the public scene and the civic life. This is because of some emerging groups with certain ideologies and agendas that took over the youth demands. The lack of youth socio political engagement affected the trust in a state commitment to engage youth in policy-making and public concerns. The quotes retrieved from the interviewees reflect and emphasize that there was an absence of trust in a real adults' commitment to initiate an engagement program or a discussion platform.

During the interview with the Program Manager in Search for Common Ground, Hendrick, described the lack of parallel conversations and understanding between the various

² <https://arab.org/directory/youth-clubs-association/>, 2022

stakeholders as a ‘dilemma’. Between the will to have a full inclusion of youth in their matters and in others but also the will of youth who is energetic and powerful enough to change and to see concrete transformations. The misunderstanding lays in the translating mechanisms and the inefficiency of the presented approaches: *“The willingness to include youth from local authorities exists but does that translate into actions? I sometimes see it is true only in certain cases where there is a political will” (Hendrick, 2022).*

Search for Common Ground is an international NGO working on several projects in Tunisia and has offices in other countries since 2012. The NGO has a main role as an implementer of projects, a coordinator, and a third party involved in youth engagement projects. Imen, working as the Country Director of both offices in Tunisia and Libya for SFCG and a previous worker in the Ministry of Youth described the flourishing ecosystem for CSOs. Hendrick and Imen both described the relationship after the uprising between CSOs and Public youth reforms as generally fluctuating with seasonal patterns that are dependent on many external variables.

After the uprising, the relationship between CSOs and public institutions received much more attention and was considered in constant improvement between 2013 and 2014, as described by Afef (Talbi, 2022) . Afef was an active youth from Kasserine, working with ‘3ish Tunisi’ (live Tunisian). An associative movement, then a political movement in the form of a coalition of electoral lists, was founded in April 2018. In November 2018, the association conducted a broad participatory democracy campaign. For three months, the members of the association gathered on the ground the opinions of citizens and their proposals to get the country out of the economic and social crisis. The campaign is also carried out on the internet and social networks and via telephone calls. Since its creation, the association has been attacked by political parties and certain media about its sources of funding. The organization is also accused of receiving foreign funding, of resorting to illegal lobbying activities, and even of working on behalf of foreign states due to its funding sources as Afef reflected.

b. Instability and security

Respondents working in public institutions and have direct work with youth and civil society noted that society tends to handpick which projects to implement. This is linked to the available infrastructure, security, and instability of the country. On the other hand, respondents from CSOs were left with mixed discontinuous information, unclear requirements, and confusing

procedures. This raised more concerns about considering institutions as their core partners. As an active engineer by education and civically engaged by passion, Aymen the founder of 'Youtheon' describes their work as a creator of an enabling atmosphere in unleashing Tunisia's youth potential towards a sustainable future for their community. Ayman was describing the general process:

Local authorities were not very cooperative with us, and they did not want to see someone who asked them questions. We couldn't even reach the point of talking to them. Today the same situation with a lot of NGOs. They do much work but then end up failing or incomplete due to the instability (Bouaziz)

In a similar experience shared by Housseem from Sidi Bouzid, founder of ATEJ organization. ATEJ supports young people in public life and contributes to the economic and social empowerment of young people. The local area Sidi Bouzid, where the organization works, is the birthplace of the revolution and has become yet another symbol of poverty and disillusionment (Petré, 2015). In describing his experience, Housseem highlighted the public perception towards CSOs in Sidi Bouzid amid the terrorism cases, economic crashes, and protests, which all played a major role in putting certain parts of the country under tighter restrictions and emphasized on regional disparity and marginalization practices:

.. I did not reach anything, and I couldn't help and decided to create my own CSO. Youth in Sidi Bouzid either went to Syria or died in the mountains for the name of 'Jihad' – I don't want to use that word. We want to change that perception that we are terrorists. After 2011 and around 2013, the Ministry of Interior gave us that tag in the Tunisian society and society. Already we are classified as the second area to export jihadists and especially 'khalifates' who are the leaders in every terrorist organization. It is normal to get brainwashed. We do not have any public space working and dedicated to youth's needs do not have anything! (Dhahri, 2022)

Housseem linked this regional marginalization due to the instability of the country as a major argument used. There were successive acts of terrorism the region and a lot of pressure was exerted to limit that including the sabotage excreted on CSOs. As Housseem describes the process he went through to officially launch his CSO : *"I opened the CSO in 2018 after I submitted our legal files. Right after five days, the Quranic school event happened and the Ministry just stopped all its legal authorizations. It took us a year to get our paperwork"* (Dhahri, 2022.)

In interviewing Mohammed who is a previously active member in various local NGOs. Currently, he works with a regional organization operating across the MENA region, providing propitious conditions for the development of education, culture, sciences, the environment, and communication in the Arab World. In investigating the challenges between CSOs and public institutions, he directly linked it to the administrative processes which are disseminating a lot of opportunities, especially funds-related ones. Since a good number of organizations get blocked at that first stage. Thus, on the other hand, he justified this causal relationship between those slow steps with the attitude of administrators with the security issue:

The problem is in the administrative system in Tunisia. Funds exist, but when you get into the formalities, it is very challenging; even hearing the word email correspondence is frightening for them. This is my experience with public institutions. Today, to get money from abroad, you either open a restaurant or an NGO! The word association got a bad reputation. 56,000 CSOs were created. Security is very important also for Tunisia (Mohammed,2022)

This classification of NGOs set more entry barriers to the smaller, size organizations and to the ones outside of the central city. Setting them back not only from creating diverse NGOs but also reducing their visibility and their outreach to funds. This practice contradicts with the development initiatives and plans of the interior areas that are at the core of the government and of the development partners' strategies.

c. Building ties with youth institutions

Developing on the nature of the current relationships between both, Mohammed explained the important role that CSOs were playing on several layers and in softening this tension between youth and institutions. Encouraging institutions to work more on building those relationships as it is bilateral, and each needs the other to create a better inclusive environment. CSOs were always there despite the tension between them and the implementers' institutions:

CSOs were the savior of Tunisia in many instances. People donated and they are the ones who saved Tunisia during the pandemic, for example. They are very strong and the country cannot function without them (Mohammed, 2022)

In a similar pattern, Sana, a former Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) expert with Search for Common Ground and a civically engaged youth, highlighted this need for CSOs to interact with institutions and the role of implementers when they work/partner with local CSOs. SFCG, classified as an international organization operating in several countries. They do receive grants

and donations to establish need-based projects. From her experience and double role in civil society and with SFCG, she highlighted the urge to facilitate these programs. SFCG Tunisia team supports addressing the country's conflicts constructively. Including Tunisia's democracy through a leadership development program for youth and through the training of media organizations (Search for Common Ground, 2022). SFCG's approach is a holistic one counting on all stakeholders. 83% of the teams are local to the countries they are working in. Their vision is to foster cooperation and change the everyday interactions between groups of people intervening, so they can work together to build up their community, choosing joint problem-solving over violence (Search for Common Ground, 2022). As Sana explains:

Public reforms today need youth and CSOs together. You can only make changes in the communities using local potential. It will be more accepted if it's coming from youth to youth with an invisible governmental hand (Guesmi, 2022)

The interview process also included some local youth centers representative to tap on these challenges previously mentioned and to analyze their perspective when it comes to building ties with CSOs and youth respectively. One of the interviewees is the director of a public youth center in a small town in the commune of Tunis Governorate, Tunisia. Samir, who plays a double role as also an active member of the Tunisian General Labor Union (UGTT) and in civil society in parallel to his current position in the youth center. When asked about the process of bureaucracy, he highlighted those bureaucratic processes are still existent, and they are indeed causing a lack of fluidity in terms of projects and services delivered.

Thus, giving an explanation to these processes especially contrasting the period after the uprising when money laundering and getting money from abroad was critical for terrorism and sponsoring certain organizations:

I know a lot of CSOs you do not know from where and how their funds are coming and going with no visibility at all. I'm open and happy to speak to everyone, but I cannot accept any NGO pretending to be serving the community but instead delivering hidden messages. I personally do not engage and work with CSOs without doing an extensive, intensive background check, even if they have/ bring a fortune as a fund. But there are small CSOs who are neglected (Samir, 2022)

Although this process of verification is very much needed considering the instability and the external challenges in the country. Thus, it is important to point out its double-edged sword role as well. It also on the other hand, the process of verification smashes the vulnerable and the

small sized CSOs. Better communication ties and clearer processes could potentially be a solution to this as pointed out by Samir. Hence, the communication flow with the concerned youth institutions as per Semah from Mattouia is “*centric and excluding*” (Abdeljabar, 2022).

Semah, being both a public institution worker in constant and daily work with the municipalities and active youth in different NGOs in his area with Junior Chamber International (JCI). He describes the process as ‘easy’ for him to communicate with the respective authorities due to their ‘need’ for his services, considering his position in the public sector. This reminds us of the old practices of the previous regime where nepotism, biases, and acquaintances were dominating civil society. This was a common observation for practice that most interviewees pointed out to. The relationship between CSOs and public institutions is strongly to be a one sided, profitable, and almost never equal in terms of power balance exerted.

Mongia is a law degree student and a previous candidate in the municipal elections. She was a participant in the first experiment of participatory budgeting in the local municipality of la Marsa. The program was piloted there, the goal is for municipalities across the country have authorized and participated in a series of public meetings where residents vote to distribute part of the budget for local services: “*These participatory budgeting programs have given direct fiscal authority to those who know the needs and priorities of their cities best*” (Tadamun, 2016). The work was implemented by an INGO as part of a partnership with and between the local government. The INGO was working with several CSOs and active local actors. Describing the process; lack of visibility, and the non-continuity in the projects leading ultimately to the aversion of the young people’s civic role category. In describing her experience, Mongia described her experience tapping on those challenges:

Participants did not have that visibility or details. The project did not pass, everyone just forgot about it in the following years. The Local Communities Journal was not adopted by the parliament, yet which included this project of Participatory Democracy. So, for 2017, all decisions were not implied. I heard they tried this experience again in 2018. I lost track (Souid, 2022)

The discontinuity in the projects was also a major hurdle for Search for Common Ground as an implementer partner in several initiatives and equally to a lot of CSOs. As Sana described based on their assessment and impact analyses, they did not have for aim to make any concrete visible change or high Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) rather than to create a lobby of

pressure and a massive disturbance to influence the decision making process and to shift the narratives:

On a larger scale, I don't think it was implemented, it was more community-municipality. The project ended there but the work continued with the beneficiaries themselves... I saw the impact on two levels. Working on the INGOs is different from working with local CSOs. My experience taught me that it's not only about the funds, but people are also actually doing work despite the challenges you still see the local impact (Guesmi, 2022)

In answering the same question describing the relationship between institutions and youth especially after the revolution and the shift change happened. Achraf, an academic researcher, and lecturer in Middle East politics with special focus on Islamism and democratization explained in that regard:

Youth felt more empowered, they voiced out their needs etc.. but still, the civil society component was under pressure, political parties too for sure. There were no institutions independent to hear these voices (Achraf, 2022)

Oussema, who is currently working as a political advisor in one of the foreign African Embassies, founder of VOTEK application, a first in Tunisia to include digital in the sphere of municipalities, for e-participative democracy. He used to be very active in CSOs and particularly a finalist in 'I'm the President' reality TV show to encourage their participation in the political life and in the decision making process empowering the next generation of Tunisian democratic leaders. Young Tunisians essentially retracted from formal politics to operate mainly in civil society and grassroots activism (Bajec, 2022). Housseem was asked about how he sees the role of young people's civic role CSOs in the system. He described the several stages that they pass through, from a homogeneous power for pressure to a reluctant and passive role with a tendency to volunteering activities more than a proper inclusion in civic life. Housseem described: *"Even if they used to have CSOs they used to work for the regime, like a cartoon, a puppy just following and obeying rules. Politicians used to refuse critica"* (Dridi, 2022).

Now CSOs are a mass of power through their voices as a pressure to rectify. CSOs and youth do not have the role of deciding, they are more of controllers, youth now do not even want to vote. Stabbing back one of the most important pillars of democratic transitions. On that, Semah responded from his expertise in working with the Ministry of Equipment and his coverage of the area, Gabes played a parallel role as an active agent in CS. Semah was confirming the lack of

active engagement politically of youth and their tendency to give up on the political arena to make their voices heard. He detailed:

My work in CSOs started in 2013-2012. I started with volunteering in Gabes with an organization to push people to go to vote. This was because of the statistics that showed 60 percent of youth do not go / refuse to vote (Abdeljabar, 2022)

This challenge contributed to a lack of trust in the existence of a plan or a tool for connecting youth with policymakers. That was a key factor that contributed to the social and political unrest that took place post-January 2011. Many youths including the interviewee decided to withdraw from the public domain and focus on their personal life due to the absence of the feel of a real change taking place on the national level.

d. Corruption and lack of adequate communication channels

According to Imen's experience in both the public institutional reforms as a former worker in the Ministry of Youth and with SFCG as a connector of funds, and with CSOs with the goal of engaging their local governance. There was a nuance in the results and some projects were sustainable and others not. What is sure is that they noticed a lot of youth civil activists becoming bright in their societies and local change agents carrying on with what they got from training and capacity building. Connecting that to some of the challenges that the local level does have; even if there are great initiatives and proposals fitting the reformal context by these youth a lot of them will be seen but will not be endorsed due to the lack of funds:

One difficulty is that even if the idea is cool, the local authorities cannot implement the project because of the lack of funds, so there is no sustainability for municipalities and for those projects (Hendrick, 2022)

Semah, from his position working with the Ministry of Equipment developed parallelly on that. Mentioning the lack of self-funds from the public institutions and their incapability to sponsor projects nor initiatives. In addition to the tight, rigid framework of processes making it even harder to open for innovation and to attract investors. He explained:

Whenever I say government, I mean the institutions responsible for fixing certain issues. We as workers in public institutions can see the problems inside. We have very rigid laws, and we should change them. Imagine now we are still using paper in everything; we do not have modems even in our offices. And now they are calling for innovations – ironic laughter (Abdeljabar, 2022)

From one side, there is a huge budget deficit and incapability for institutions to provide space and to sponsor initiatives. On the other hand, more and more restrictions are exerted on these CSOs in their operating level, limiting their access to funds. Amid the recent changes to law in Tunisia, decree 88, arguments were questioning its necessity as a new NGO regulatory law while Decree 88 was not even fully implemented and was only on paper. The decree puts more restrictions particularly on foreign funding (Project on Middle East Democracy, 2018). Rashed from the Iwatch organization sees the future consequences on the scalability and even the existence of CSOs after such instability and sudden changes. He explains:

The problem is how these new regulations will be implemented, the amendment of the 88 Decree institutions versus CSOs relations. With the suspension of the parliament a lot of NGOs disappeared because they didn't adapt their work mainly with the parliament changes. These organizations need to think how to diverse themselves and about their scalability (Rashed, 2022)

Public institutions were not highly appreciated for their communication schemes too as previously mentioned. The fragile communication spread and the centralized approach makes it hard not only for youth but also for CSOs- as connectors to establish that long lived connection of trust. This perception clustered and classified CSOs into categories of who will benefit from the funds and offered trainings. This led to the creation of a divide between them and disabled any room of cooperation. As explained by Alexandre describing the 'unequal' distribution of rights and duties and their selective approach when it comes to opportunities from the public institutions through their tailored reforms vis a vis CSOs.

The perception of youth towards public institutions is shaped by their share from the projects and infrastructure building investments in the area. Reshaping and rebalancing the scales and the distributions with decentralization was a key element and recommendation mentioned by the interviewees from whom some fled the country and cut off their ties with any civic engagement there. They described their experience as deceptive, and marginalizing despite the amount of freedom that was guaranteed after the uprising. As Hamza stated:

I would accept going back to Tunisia to have a bit of power. You need to have the power to impose your respect. But I want when I come back to Tunisia to make a change, a real one. I'm thinking about this every day. I don't want to go back to being a follower (Mahjoubi, 2022)

Oussama explained the general new attitude of youth where they feel still underrepresented in an old institutional framework, as himself:

The promises are lies, we will improve the situation, employability etc. That's why a lot of youth are immigrating. Not everyone is thinking of just leaving not only for academics, but they are also just escaping. Being in Tunisia is a source of psychological disorder (Dridi, 2022)

As mentalities and needs are changing, convincing public officials today that it is equally important to municipalities and public institutions to collaborate with and among each other's for better youth inclusion. Being young people's civic role is just a stage. Respondents who were at a certain point after the uprising active and engaged in the civic scene decided to leave after losing the flare with a passive deceptive attitude. This is a common realization between all interviewees: similar civil features – they were at some point or are still independently involved in the Tunisian civil society. Some of them are no longer active in civil society and decided to step back and some had rehabilitation with certain public institutions. Others left Tunisia for France and other European countries while others remained still in Tunisia. The common feature about all of them is that they are completely not involved in political life currently or about to leave. Mongia explained this referring to her experience as a local coordinator in the participatory budget pilot project in Sidi Bou Said municipality:

Now, I'm seeing deception, I do not see any encouragement. When we see the projects, we think that it's going to be Beverly hills but later we conclude that it is nothing We do not even hear about the general municipality meetings, some representatives join, others not. I stepped out from the scene (Souid, 2022)

Interviewees from youth who did not take any leadership positions, are just put behind desks. The way of hand picking the most talented and brilliant youths, and giving them other positions to take care of was a practice of the old regime to make them leave the political and civic scene. Housseem detailed on this raising important questions to be considered:

Why not youth leading political parties? Do we have ideas? From 220 political parties, less than 3 do have youth represented. That's why youth are not joining the political arena, you are young, too early for you, you don't know anything. Foreigners trusted us, why not you? They don't even trust you to hear your voice (Dridi, 2022)

Respondents were all pointing out the lack of a similar line of communication between both the institutions and they with no synchronization. A stable flow of communication brings creative ideas and innovations as well. As Alexandre explained from his stand as a street artist and delivering his messages through art movements. What was interesting and brought relevant new data is that respondents from the hard-to-reach communities had their local municipalities and youth centers supporting them. Reasons varied as some explained, due to the narrow, small number of local citizens, communities tend to know each other and tend to give referral for support. Hence, since limited by resources anyways, the impact is not as visible as in other areas. This attachment to the local communities created a sense of exclusion as per Ayman's experience. He founded his NGO in a region other than where he was born and raised:

I'm working in a region that is not mine, I felt as a stranger, dialects, behaviors wise, they are a bit of a closed society. They were different, serving in Jendouba although I'm from Kasserine, Sbeitla. It'll be more than 8 years now since we were working there so they are starting to accept us (Bouazizi, 2022)

There is still this mentality among local authorities in specifically underprivileged communities, sometimes it's hard for them to hear recommendations from youth. They do not look at you seriously. However, the local CSOs as local structures can make a link. CSOs can bring the perspective of youth and local authorities to involve youth though involving the local community, you need to have the public institutions resources by your side. That perception of youth as a non-mature component increased the old practices of bureaucracy and authority using a linear pattern. As Hamza, who during high school year wanted to open a club in his local high school. Describing his experience:

These criteria were silly, like the youth club wanted us to be recognized by the high school and some signatures on papers. We couldn't get these approvals. It made a bit of sense as we needed to have their endorsement to get where to do our meetings, make the coordination with the municipality if needed and ensure all the bureaucratic work on our behalf as our guaranteed/ supervisors. Our high school refused to be part of this (Mahjoubi, 2022)

Hamza who is now pursuing his studies abroad and used to be an active youth in his region with Youth Centers and other initiatives describes his perception of CSOs who get funds from private parties and external communities. Reflecting on his experience, he mirrors the idea

of being biased and losing much of your independence once you receive funds especially with the sensitive political instability that the country is passing through:

It's all about money, politics now. You should sell your soul. I'm not sure if there is hope for Tunisia, but I just pray that there is some (Mahjoubi, 2022)

Along with bureaucracy and political exclusion, passive role, nepotism, wasta, and referral is still a major force power re-shaping the balances in these CSOs when dealing with institutions creating untrust. Between these bilateral challenges from youth and institutions equally, as even public institutions, locally they are trying to make their work effective, people won't accept from them as they see any of their speeches linked to personas, they need CSOs to disperse the local central system to the other regions. public institutions are not facilitating the connection, people do not trust them despite all the changes. Youth concerns are transversal. It's not only in ministries or public institutions, but also a transversal process where a lot of ministries join and have interactions. None of these pillars could work alone, starting with the youth centers will not be able to do anything without the intervention of other CSOs and partners and even better with the private sector.

V.2. Damaging in youth perceptions to CSOs

Civil society is highly important in promoting youth participation and engagement in any society. One of the key advantages for civil society organizations is the ability to access areas that the government may have challenges in reaching due to lack of resources but mainly if these CSOs do not manage to get youth onboard with them as support. In this interviewees who were or are members of CSOs shared their insights. The interviews focused on the perspectives of these youth towards CSOs in Tunisia today and on the current level of participation and what is needed to promote youth participation and its importance.

a. Networking opportunity and creating local change

Joining the civil society activities as a young youth opened up the floor to their skills to flourish and to develop. The path was not easy as CSOs and civil society work was always linked to the previous regime and youth did not understand nor see the impact of their work immediately. Semah describes the perception of his peers when he first embarked civil society

work: “They used to laugh at us in coffee shops. They were always asking us, what will you gain from this? Or how much are they giving you?” (Abdeljabar, 2022).

Respondents confirmed the shift of this perception and the shift of civil society work to be a source of employment rather than a place to only voice needs. As Semah described: “After years of exclusion and making fun of us, a lot have joined us, and our network. They now feel like they want to listen to our experiences” (Abdeljabar, 2022). Respondents are or were at some point relying on CSOs opportunities through the funds they receive as jobs. Those transitional jobs offered them the opportunities to open to the international market and more than half respondents are currently working with well Known INGOs abroad or in Tunisia. Having civil society as a third job provider is a transitional shift that is threatened currently by the different ecosystem challenges such as instability and lack of funds.

Through, respondents confirmed the positive space and impact that civil society offers CSOs to deliver services. On the other hand, it offered a space for a good number of youths to get jobs in CSOs as they become recruiters themselves. CSOs became a source of employability, offering jobs, and positions to qualified youth. As Sameh explained from his experience on how he got his current job with the Ministry of Equipment, it was by reference from his previous CSOs engagement. His engagement with civil work enabled him to develop his skills and to learn other than are not traditionally taught in schools. Semah described:

I felt very empowered and started looking for other NGOs who will give me more opportunities to grow as I felt really a good influence on my career. Like now I have an idea about every topic. I was a finalist and I'm happy I must create such a big network. I don't need to have a degree to understand certain fields, just through civil society (Abdeljabar, 2022)

Oussema explained the nature of the relationship between the CSOs and youth themselves. Starting from the idea of not expecting anything in return except self-satisfaction, local change, and the idea of serving. Right after the revolution, youth were thirsty for change and eager to give up from their time to create change. Respondents were explaining a new tendency of youth of only volunteering with charity work and refuting any involvement and engagement with CSOs only if it is in the context of employment and paid. Oussema, explained that:

You should not and do not expect anything, I spent 8 years of free giving. My neighbors were surprised as if I'm wasting time. Before I was dull and did not even know how to

take the initiative to speak up in public. Now I can voice my opinion and ideas and debate for them but I need to see my future too (Dridi, 2022)

IWatch, a leading watchdog NGO in Tunisia enhancing transparency and fighting corruption through projects related to the UNCAC. They follow two main principles: No exclusion and no trusteeship. Rashed, who holds a strategic position in the organization described the aim of their work and how to use that as an influencing power. A power that can hold accountable the public institutions and seek to have a visible representation and a clear strategy to implement youth empowerment projects with no corruption:

We do not care if it passes or not, more of raising awareness. People should be aware it's for them and we aim to make them know, we are going to say we are here to rule (, 2022)

b. Disorganized, no unity

One of the most pressing challenges that CSOs are facing today is the lack of unity. The revolution was characterized by a massive collaboration between the different civil society components including CSOs and the civically engaged youth. Rami explains the consequences of such dissociation and its implications on the massive power pressure engendering an abuse of power at the hands of the locals public institutions and disempowering the voiced requests:

Unity of CSOs is very crucial, differences should unite us and not the opposite even if we have different ideologies. Real established vision, voice for people. Without having that, you will face a very vulnerable abuse of power (Rami, 2022)

Respondents mentioned other challenges besides the defies between CSOs but also within the structure of CSOs leading to youth disengagement. No bilateral communication between the members, with a very steep, vertical decision-making process making their consolidated efforts divided. The absence of a clear pyramid for structure enables conflicts of interests to take over. Aymen explained from his experience in activism in his local area, as a dynamic, engaged youth after the revolution that there was a huge lack of coordination between the different CSOs. In addition to no collaboration on the local level. Respondents were all mentioning the redundancy in the topics and areas of work with the absence of synergy without a real change on the ground level.

c. Easy money and corruption

The perception of youth nowadays and their activism was shaken by the previous unsuccessful, unfinished experiences and attempts of change whether locally or on a larger scale. Sarra, currently working with a leading tech company worldwide in Ireland, left Tunisia a couple of years ago for better job opportunities. Her responses were showing deception and disappointment from what is happening but still her commitment to support the country in any form but outside the civil society work. Respondents from whether students or workers abroad all highlighted their frustration as a major reason for them to leave the country besides the lack of adequate opportunities is their disempowerment. Sara explains her perception:

We all know that a lot of CSOs are taking money from the offered funds for personal use. I know someone who got a grant and went to Canada using that money. There is a lot of corruption! I do not trust them personally. Only the bare minimum is not corrupted, I would not give my money to Tunisian organization at all now (Sarra, 2022)

Other responses besides corruption identified criticism towards the actual programs offered as they do not really identify or tackle the local needs. The programs implemented and the set reforms by the public institutions or in partnerships with donors are not based on solid mapping or needs assessment that takes into consideration the different layers' requests. Even before going further with the interview questions regarding receiving donors' funds, Dorra interrupted the discussion with her short insights on interacting with institutions:

When I got inside the politics in CSOs I realized some of them are very complex and have problems they need to fix. I've never dealt with public institutions or been a beneficiary of any of their reforms. I didn't get circle did have a very horrible experience dealing with the public sector, we always try to avoid it (Arbia, 2022)

Kamel was working as a facilitator with the Ma3an project: "The goal of Ma3an is to increase the capacity of Tunisian communities to withstand political, social and economic challenges and identify opportunities" (USAID). The program is with partnership with the Tunisian government funded by USAID and implemented by FHI60 lab, Kamel was among the selected facilitators to receive the extensive capacity building training and will implement the program in his local area. Ma3an is based on needs mapping and then rounded dialogue with the intervening authorities to debate, discuss, change, and implement the initiatives extracted from the mapping process. When giving his opinion on the project, he explains:

In Tunisia, this is my bread (referring to being a trainer). if you want to get money just open an organization. If you know your ways, you can make money, no impact or

whatsoever. The project Ma3an in partnership with the government is one of the highest rates of funds. Implemented by several partners like IREX, USAID etc. Money poured into this is more than what is necessary. Other projects are making more impact with less funds. It's 'let's have fun in a hotel and that's all'. It's time to change the mentality of wasting resources: how can you make a project without proper infrastructure ? (Kamel, 2022)

Respondents explain that going to these capacity building training is no longer as beneficent as the early years of the revolution, even more there is a tendency for youth to join these activities just to benefit from the pension received and not for the real change. This results in a system with no trust between the different stakeholders and going back to the old regime's tradition of having youth as decorative items which exacerbates the problem.

d. Depoliticization of youth

Afef's experience with '3ish Tounsi' was based on this perception too. She left her position as a Project Manager in her region, Kasserine. In reflecting on some of the reasons why she left the initiative despite it grappling a lot of attention, she highlighted:

Anyone joining a project like this knows that they will be joining a political group: politicized. I left that job because they played a political game on me that didn't represent me. People who were against their personal affairs and mainly politicians. They are very strong in the country, in my region, a thief represents me, imagine that! They bribe, I can't (Talbi, 2022)

The results of the interviews showed that respondents from the youth category were detaching themselves from the political sphere and preferred being either volunteering or independently working in CSOs that are not politically active. The deception received after the revolution from the political layer and the public institutions led them to refute the political scene. Alexandre from another perspective had a different response, he explained this :

CSOs work is controlled by heads before and after the revolution. More politically oriented. The owners of organizations are like brand imaging. CSOs are not working, and they are just collecting money (Maalel)

Respondents from youth explained how joining CSOs was merely linked to a social class and had also a hierarchy inside its structures making it a mini representation of the public bodies. Rather than creating a homogenous cercle, it was used as a propaganda tool. "Out of 25,000

registered CSOs in Tunisia, only 5000 are effectively active with a big part of them ending up being politically affiliated” (Bouazizi, 2022).

Semah explained his investment to be involved in civic life and the need to invest certain resources to unleash fully your potentials within CSOs and to be fully included. He carried on describing his journey and his travels to attend the frequent meetings and to be just physically present, all required him to be financially independent and that he couldn't do that without investing some of his financial resources, lack of means, or a certain social class. The social and economic situation was a prominent factor highlighted by respondents for youth and making everything accessible to them is the key to have them included and empowered; to open the door for them to actively participate in CSOs. Semah described :

I do work already. If I was unemployed, I would not waste 4 hours on a Saturday paying from my own pocket to join certain meetings. My priority would be to save money for life. (Abdeljabar, 2022)

Alexandre built equally on the same idea, adding the challenge of trust as well. The need to have a safe space/ zone where youth can express themselves freely without control is needed and if politics are added to the equation, it loses its credibility and red flags will be raised asking for accountability as they are perceived as propaganda generators. Alexandre described his pure neutrality and refused from getting involved with anything related to politics.

e. ‘Our’ compared to ‘their’ discourses

Despite the feeling of satisfaction after serving and empowering local communities. Respondents from youth who decided to leave the civic life through CSOs were hesitant and had divergent opinions when it came to the idea of being active or engaged. Kamel was the winner of the editions of ‘Sawt Alshabab Al Arabi’, one of the biggest debating competitions in the region launched right after the revolution, ending his cycle of volunteering after being overwhelmed by the system of imposed discourses with no real improvement. Some of the opportunities are using youth and their potentials to realize their activities which do not necessarily align with the real needs. He explains:

You feel you’re serving people and they go up and you remain there, at the bottom down. In civil society work, there is egoism and greediness in sharing information. Now I have become selective of opportunities too (Kamel, 2022)

Respondents were describing another sort of challenge when dealing with the community of donors and the INGOs. The administrative and bureaucratic structure in them hinders their improvement in level and capacity. On that Houssein reflects on his experience:

There was a problem in the system. I used to pay and never got my membership card except for the first year. I left because they don't work. It's just youth tourism as they go to hotels. Even when I send them proposals, they ditch them as they have them set already (Dridi, 2022)

Hamza was describing his experience as well regarding the attitude of degrading and looking down from CSOs themselves which was linked as per the respondents to regionalism and social classes clashes. The lack of experience in youth's profiles, along with low funds for project implementation, increases the risk to INGOs and dooms youth as uninteresting calibers. As explained in the literature, the insufficient knowledge and education disadvantages their position which affects their possibility of becoming higher in ranking. Hamza explained: “*We were just volunteering for them, like the social class structure, regional disparities*” (Mahjoubi, 2022). These groups were classifying the members based on their social class, school, and origins.

The role of youth as change agents is linked to the number of opportunities and their qualities received. As youth is not a constant phase in life, their needs change as well. The need to have a structure based and to not link it to people to create a process of delegation is important as respondents were mentioning the saturation from the usual training and capacity building programs given, aspiring for more ground-breaking approaches for creative thinking and innovation to have independent youth bodies, aware, and actively engaged. Alexandre explained: “*We are not going to work under others, you will end up getting the leftovers and you need to align with their thoughts even if they give you a good amount of money*” (Maalel).

f. Gender roles

The interviews revealed new themes that were not crossed during the literature review part. The series of interviews with different interviewees from different areas in Tunisia, social class, and gender showed that there are also different perceptions and challenges specifically for the female participants. Sana, mentioning this example describing the circumstances of some girls while joining their trainings: “*Some parents wouldn't allow their female kids to join any of*

our workshops as it was in another community. But the willingness was there, some female participants brought their relatives with them to be able to join the workshops” (Guesmi, 2022). Particularly female respondents mentioned the gender theme oppositely to the other respondents from different categories. Challenges covering time management, social structures, and social pressures were at the top of them. Female respondents were from different regions, social classes, and jobs.

V.3.1. Unemployment after activism

a. Stagnation: No representation, no more learning, no jobs

The first objective to joining civil society activities whether as an actively and civically engaged youth or as part of an organization was to share, implement change, and to be heard. Respondents were divided into two categories when it comes to their reason for joining civil society. The first category stepped out or was ‘excluded’ from the civic work. The second category is still attached to it but took different paths. Afef, late 20’s, taking her masters degree in social and economic solidarity in the National Institute of Labor and Social studies (INTES). She was a part of ‘I’m the President’ program with SFCG in the training and events management, describing her experience of unemployment after and working with Tamkeen, a newly created association that strengthens the fabric of support organizations for micro-entrepreneurs, UNICEF, and others.

The attention given to youth who are active and benefited from capacity building programs was little or even absent. This category of civically engaged youth were active actors leading the change, implementing programs with donors, and have wide networks of supporters and followers. public institutions and public youth mechanisms did not take advantage of that and these youth are today divided as per the answers of respondents into two categories, either unemployed youth who are no longer willing to participate in civic life nor to be engaged in any form of empowerment and development. Or youth who managed to nail jobs with INGOs or abroad and ultimately have a tendency to either leave the country or they have already left it. This observation was mainly drawn from the answers of respondents who are living and/or from areas outside the capital and the coast. *Houssein described the employability rate in his area Sidi Bouzid: “I’m unemployed, some other CSOs also were created after us taking the lead but we were all unemployed” (Dhahri, 2022).*

This finding aligns with what was mentioned in the previous sections. People are taking opportunities not on a merit based using their networks. Each respondent at least was highlighting a similar incident where they did not get what they see is fair to them. work before, but now I'm almost unemployed. civil society work did not prove its sustainability nor its fairness especially in the last couple of years when it became a market where some NGOs assign and recruit with no visibility. On the other hand, the civil society works as much as it is not a long term commitment, there was a tremendous stagnation in the market pushing young people to seek abroad opportunities.

b. Youth disenfranchisement: Education and Escape

Respondents were emphasizing on the importance of the global exchange experiences in shaping their orientations and the way they express their activism. All respondents were part, participated, or organized such youth exchange programs abroad and got the chance to join the international community. They all initially brought back their expertise and knowledge to their local communities whether as active independent change agents or within organizations.

Community needs are great motivators for respondents to carry on their work despite the huge difference between the education received and their actual/current work which is mainly with the nonprofit sector. As Asma explained: *“This field helped me in my relationships with the people, family, and community. You get more encouraged as you see the spirit increasing, we started with only 5 people. Now we have more than 100 members and volunteers”* (Attig, 2022).

They explained that the esteemed improvement was not implemented despite a lot of wait and action. Both Hamza and Sarra are like many other youths who decided to leave the country. When describing their experiences, they both no longer follow the political, social, nor economic scenes and lost that excitement and enthusiasm they had in the beginning. Hamza describes:

Living in Hungry working and studying. I stopped working in anything related to civil society. I had a burnout when I was 17 years old, schoolwork but also because I wanted to change my region. I was very dedicated to putting all my efforts there. I left after that immediately! Omg that's 8 years ago, I feel old! (Mahjoubi, 2022)

The boom in civil society brought a new wave of job opportunities to the unemployed youth. Imen as a previous employee in the Ministry of Youth explains how their work with Search for Common ground INGO created more future opportunities whether as temporary jobs or project based ones for youth who benefited from capacity building trainings:

These leaders that we trained are now CSOs and have funds from abroad. They are the leaders of today and we know them by name, CSOs are their job now. Before it was only volunteering, now it is a market and a job which is positive and negative (Belhedi, 2022)

For CSOs to be able to provide job opportunities they go through the cycle of applying to funds and grants. Thus, as Rashed explained, the regulations are putting more and more limitations on the external funds and thus cutting off the jobs that were just created in the past years. Being tied to civil society and to CSOs is not also considered as a strong commitment for life. Respondents were identifying it only as a temporary stage in their lives. Dorra explained:

I need to move to my other stage in life, such small NGOs do not satisfy my curiosity anymore. Now, at this stage of my career life, I need stability and need to leave and to stop being civically engaged. I want to impact more people, but I didn't find that fits my vision (Arbia, 2022)

The sample took Tunisian youth who were involved in the uprising and/or who started their involvement right after it. Results showed that all respondents took different paths for their future. In between those who left the country for studying and work and those who left local civil work and either tended to completely disconnect from the civic involvement sphere or to only volunteer in individual charitable actions in the area they are residing in. Respondents justified their deviation after all the excitement to seek new learning opportunities and to escape what they described as a dead block future.

V.3. Donors' discourses

Civil society Organizations are key society component actors as they can target marginalized populations and provide services that the State and the market cannot do. This is in conformity with the "third sector" theory. On the other hand, civil society is a conscious society as a democratic driving force: based on free assembly principles and civic engagement it challenges authoritarian regimes and promotes democratic practices within society. Therefore, civil society promotion programs rely on three components: capacity building, social service provision, and policy dialogue. There is a general and recent trend among donors to favor the policy dialogue component to the expense of service provision. This section and the following up one will study the role of donors and then the perceptions of the CSOs on how this system works.

a. Local needs and global narratives

For many interviewees, two types of patterns were channeled to CSOs from the community of donors from a global perspective and a local one. For CSOs to maintain their expenses. CSOs fall into the trap of accepting the needs of donors and working with them based on their assessment of the needs. Only a few CSOs transform these needs- mandates to their local needs. On the other hand, when youth see what donors are giving them from free food-transport. Despite the trials of various CSOs, respondents confirmed that there was no other solution, either to accept the provided templates and tailored needs or to not benefit from any advantages if you decide to do things different, from their own narratives. Receiving grants means merely entering a process of bureaucratization or professionalization. Alexandre, who is the co-founder of an art-oriented organization, said:

It's hard to get the gratitude of the American embassy and to receive any funds with them. You need to show what you can really do, show your history etc. They will not accept anything not aligning within their values, visions, different priorities, and contexts (Maalel)

For Aymen the need for the donor's support is also parallel with their visibility and trust. You will be much more linked and included if you work with the big donors (Bouazizi, 2022). Respondents have noted that the range of grants and provided financial streams are influencing their work directions. Many of the CSOs had to lose many of their talented youth with losses due to improper implementation of the projects, or unawareness of the local needs and felt disintegrated. Respondents from CSOs highlighted the different level of power relations when undertaking negotiations with donors. They outlined a certain discomfort in defending their initiatives due to the lack of support from the local, public authorities. Weakening their position and ending up following the discourse presented or labeled in groups. Rami is an expert in Middle East democratic transition, an active agent in Egypt, and regionally describes his experience of being clustered to a certain group in one of the meetings with donors:

We discovered they know everything about us, and even with good predictions on what I'll do in the future. Once, one declared, I read your bio and background. So, we asked them, how do they describe us to the others? In fact, 2 weeks before the meeting, they were doing kind of day to day follow up on us. They were labeling us as radicals although we said we are not. We felt sort of discriminated and already excluded (Rami, 2022)

All the interviewed experts recalled and emphasized on the role of local bargaining power that should be there to shape those narratives. A new or alternate change in the culture of innovations and alternative financing. Funds should not be our first source; nor the sole option available. For CSOs to keep their autonomy, they should negotiate. Receiving funds will narrow their freedom and reduce your credibility.

Interviewees were skeptical about such the implemented and offered programs and whether there is a governmental or donors' initiative to prepare youth for leadership and participation in civic life. Respondents highlighted the tendency of youth to participate in these activities as part of 'Youth Tourism'. This concept flourished after 2011 where youth was exposed to certain programs and they joined to benefit from the stipend, facilities, and support they get from donors. Samir, a director in one of the municipalities, who is himself an active in civil society, shared that during the application phase there was some skepticism towards whether this program is really supported by the public institutions or not. And whether it will hear their voices or not. He described:

What I do not appreciate in these capacity and youth empowerment programs is that they think and act as if they are our guardians. Youth experience is different from youth now. Youth think alone, just give them the equipment and the tools; you'll see wonders. Youth now are thinking differently, they no longer like the rounded tables and hotels (Samir, 2022)

Sana, a previous worker with Search for Common Ground explained the meeting the needs versus what is offered. Her observation is from her field work in delivering trainings to youth in coastal areas: *"On the other side, the provided training is not fitting the local contexts"* (Guesmi, 2022)

b. Alternative sources of funds and innovation

International donors are systemic actors endowed with structural powers: as most national actors depend on them and their funding, whether government or civil society organizations, they disseminate standards and practices in partner countries. The main impact of donor funding to CSOs is the creation of a local economic market of the third sector or non-profit sector, with the rapid creation of thousands of organizations aimed at receiving international funding and implementing projects, which in many cases tend to substitute for state projects or public services. This economic market is also a labor market. On the one hand, and in

theory, grants aim to give organizations the means to develop their initiatives. But in practice, especially when grants become high, receiving grants means entering a process of bureaucratization or professionalization, based on hiring and retaining professionals specialized in fundraising and fund management.

Answering the critical lack of funds and the other challenges faced, the very common answer from the experts is to push CSOs towards innovation and alternative solutions. The need for funds will always be there for CSOs to exist and for a big number of youths to work. As described by Houssem, as the co-founder of an NGO in Sidi Bouzid and who never benefited and made it to get funds: *“The participation of youth changed when we received our last fund. You cannot move a rock without a big truck, we needed the money” (Dhahri, 2022)*

c. No transparency - *en vogue* approach

During the interview with one of the INGOs, with a high reputation in implementing projects and having intensive on groundwork, the project manager was describing their role in the implementation which is similar for several INGOs and lately NGOs in Tunisia. These entities receive external funds and grants through applications, embassies, and referral. The work on the project starts and the CSOs component is usually recruited as a consultant because of their knowledge of the local contexts. Mentioning one of the biggest projects by UNDP Tunisia local bureau:

It was a UNDP project over five months only, creating hubs, camps, and councils. Bringing together hard reached youth, media, ministries, to come up with initiatives and policies. There were again CSOs mobilizing these youths. Youth to youth led projects. There was no evaluation, we heard that this was elected as the best elected. We did our internal evaluation, but we didn't hear anything from the other side (Hendrick, 2022)

In this process where the assessment part was lacking, several implementers end up being excluded from the processes of receiving grants and funds. The respondent followed up describing a typical training conducted by INGOs and donors:

The second phase: despite the thousands of evaluations done from donors, there are CSOs who are not benefiting from grants, will not get access to information and cannot compete with the big heads but are really the ones implementing the change. Now you take a hard-to-reach youth, take him to a 5 stars hotel and tell him about poverty reduction. What will this youth feel? Trust me anger and frustration (Belhedi, 2022)

Respondents from the INGOs and experts were mentioning the lack of coordination and communication as internal challenges among the community of donors themselves. Happened that the same youth joined the same project idea in different donors' umbrellas. This lack of coordination created a market for the donors and fractionated based on how close/ strong they are with the public institutions. As explained by Imen Belhadi from Search for Common Ground Organization: *“Now the donors who are ‘friends of the government’ and they became as if they are the right hand of the government. We will include CSOs just to fit in the international rules and criteria, only for the sake of pictures”* (Belhedi, 2022) This close relationship made their relationship with the youth unstable as Imen followed up: *“Donors are now the government, and we know that the relationship between the government and the youth is unstable”* (Belhedi, 2022).

V.4. CSOs and funds

The role of donors to CSOs in the MENA countries is very different according to the countries and to the donors. Bilateral donors have a greater political agenda based on historical relationships with country partners and competition relational among bilateral donors. Multilateral donors such as the European Union (EU) are less political, while the most important one, budget wise. In Tunisia post uprising, the primary source of funding as reported by the CSO stakeholders surveyed indicate that the largest share of organizations are dependent on donations from individuals and foreign funders. From 2014 to 2017, CSOs indicated that the income from their primary income source largely remained the same (ICNL, BRD, Minneapolis, 2018). Subsequently, one of the easiest legal ways that was opened up after the revolution to get access to funds was to open an organization.

a. Lack of representation: Businessman of CSOs

Respondents as members of CSOs and NGOs were questioning their participation and role in communicating their needs and wants through their active involvement in civil society work. The actively engaged members that were interviewed as part of CSOs expressed their disagreement with the long-term plans and structural directions of CSOs and subsequently felt marginalized and unheard. One attribute also mentioned was the tendency of these organizations to target more quantity over quality projects based on the fund received. As the experience

shared by Kamel who got selected to various extensive training opportunities from donors and INGOs and who is now pursuing a full-time seasonal freelancing job as a trainer is providing mentorship to organizations, he explained with hesitation:

I was super active between 2019-2020. After that, I decided to stop. You just find yourself working for others, they are growing up and you do not get anything. The maximum would be a certificate. Why would I volunteer and use my money? (Kamel, 2022)

The lack of representation and evolution from the learning process, from the routine of the same position and the same activities is also experienced by CSOs themselves vis a vis their counterparts of donors and public institutions. Respondents who are active as part of CSOs confirmed that they feel used for certain purposes as tools, but they do care mainly about the change, so they accept the requirements and activities suggested just for the esteemed change. These institutions do like to be at the center of the coverage and to take over all the credits. Instead, a big part of the work was conducted and carried on by the CSOs themselves. As Kamel described: *“When the impact becomes only for pictures and showing, we can’t talk about a real one. What is happening here is not an impact. This is actually one of our biggest challenges” (Kamel, 2022).*

Respondents were also aware of the selective and exclusive approaches rather than inclusive and holistic ways used by CSOs in determining their participation, the level of engagement, the degree of integration and funds information circulation in organizations. The information about funds and the possibilities of getting grants is not communicated properly. The beneficiaries from hard-to-reach communities from my sample respondents are from various regions. Those located outside the capital expressed this extremely niche and competitive market of grants for them compared to the other big and large NGOs. They had to compromise and change their plans to benefit from some facilities which is not necessarily their wish. As Alexandre explained: *“It is hard to get money for the hard-to-reach communities. You find grants that do not really fit our ideas and capacities” (Maalel).* Members of Brotherhood Art and from different other respondents from CSOs expressed their self-investment of resources to carry out with their ideas and projects. Usually due to the lack of capacities and long term strategies, they end up receiving small grants and barely funds enough for an event. This clustered them in a small circle of operation. As Kamel put it shortly in a circular process: *“The end of the budget, the end of money, the end of the project” (Kamel, 2022).*

Asma was elected as a board member with the local committee of the Red Croissant in this year. In explaining the hierarchical divisions inside the same organization but the different committees spread regionally to the local areas, she followed up:

The structure is like a central committee, regional committee, and local committee. Procedures to get money even from the central entity is complicated. And our central committee is always lazy, not really encouraging us to reach out to them (Attig, 2022)

Respondents were labeling CSOs and those with big names, and know how to get these funds they want to work on whoever they are interested in. Only two respondents mentioned the importance of the private sector as donors and a more guaranteed option to use as backers better than the instability and unsustainability when dealing with the larger international community of donors. Mohammed explained:

Private sector in Tunisia is supporting a lot! They give a lot of funds; you need to know how to approach them. Plus, any penny you invest in donations to NGOs will be reduced with a certain formula from their taxes (Mohammed, 2022)

For many people there were pressing problems with working in CSOs and central committees compared to when they work with the big committees. These central offices depending on the regions also do have certain benefits that the local ones do not enjoy as previously presented in the sections. The mapping exercise when reaching out whether to fund donors or from local public institutions must be less hierarchical as the central committees are the ones distributing the money and the local ones end up with small amounts or mostly nothing. Housseem on the other hand explained this tendency of donors to handpick the CSOs based on their members' potentials and qualifications.

b. Real change agents

Donors rely heavily on CSOs for their work, this bilateral relationship is needed to be able to have an onsite vision brought by local actors. Youth elements do already have established networks, similar to CSOs working in mutual exchange. Projects and initiatives are implemented with the collaboration of public institutions and youth centers. All parts are needed as strategic partners, a lot of projects ended after a year or so, the funds are really limited. CSOs need to develop ways to sustain shared learning sessions for sustainability.

This reliance from the community of donors on CSOs came with its criterions and matrices. Responding to the question of how they see the change. They were reluctant and yet

emphasizing on the different needs and views of requests from the donors causing pressure, and lack of sustainability as funds are limited and tied to various criteria causing turbulent relationships based on power balance. As Oussama argued that CSOs do not get enough resources and end up accepting what is offered to them without the power to negotiate. He described :

No sustainability, CSOs are run by donors and cannot function without them. Now with the new laws less funds are available. Public donors are useless, very small contributions. donors impose rules, themes on you. Making you accept what they want in a very indirect way. If you're not on the same line, they will dispatch you simply. They even block you in a list, so no sponsor approaches you at all (Dhahri, 2022)

c. Income generator and political agendas

Even though it is assumed after the uprising that the problem in civil society is the lack of funds and of technical expertise. Interviewees explained that there are a set of required skills needed for youth to be skillful and knowledgeable for an effective participation process in the public sphere and decision- making processes which they do not necessarily have. Youth should receive training on curriculums of debating, negotiations and introduction to public policies and political awareness as what are elections and how to participate. In addition to improving critical thinking and analysis skills in order to enable youth to analyze social, economic and political challenges and provide innovative and creative solutions.

Interviewees revealed other challenges and were explaining other problems with CSOs themselves and the nature of the programs implemented and of the delivered capacity building training. Factors such as exclusion, no visibility and enough reporting were always present for most respondents. As Afef, a previous project manager with donors and with CSOs explained:

The problem with civil society in Tunisian is society first. We saw a lot of CSOs booming, and youth were eager to work. Now they are making money from these donors without tractility, even inclusion is not a real one, and politics is usually there (Talbi, 2022)

Contrary to the narrative of Search for Common Ground, as an INGO, a receiver, and a distributor of funds, in their program 'I'm the president', they have asked all their participants to postpone and or to resign from any of their current political and public institutional affiliations. This is a measure imposed to avoid political propaganda as it happened in other programs. As Imen explained the sensitivity of their program and how these trained youth ended up joining

political parties willingly: *“During the final episodes a lot of political parties wanted to get the candidates contacts some of them ended up joining some political parties” (Belhedi, 2022).*

Respondents who were representing CSOs not benefitting from the community of donor’s support mentioned the public money and funds they get from their local municipalities and houses of youth. These funds were very limited and did not cover any expenses. This is in addition to the rough process of getting them and the need to have municipalities and local authorities approvals. As explained by Oussema: *“The municipality is not doing what’s needed morally, financially, or at any level but still the municipality is needed. They only do that a bit only if you know someone there” (Dhahri, 2022).*

Chapter VI. Conclusion and Recommendations

a. Conclusion

Youth who used to be seen as the problem before the Tunisian uprising, were the ones leading the revolution in the Tunisian streets and inspiring other peers to speak up, act, and to revolt. Hence overthrowing a regime of 50 years of oppression and tyranny is different than ousting one person or a whole family. Witnessing closely the uprising in Tunisia made the issue so poignant to me personally. In this research, I used a threefold theoretical framework to look at the apparent challenging position of youth themselves and to transmit their needs and to the role of CSOs in containing those aspirations. The analysis leaned more towards contrasting the early and the recent phases of the transitional period being the most insightful in the youth's experience. The ever- changing circumstances and political transformations not only affected the stream of the analysis but also nuanced the understanding and perceptions of previous stances.

In this thesis, to understand the role of CSOs in the empowerment of youth, it is indispensable to analyze public institutions' role and the development agencies as an integral part of the study. I interviewed 30 young men and women twice in between Tunisia, Egypt, and abroad. Coupled with analyzing extensively the reports, articles, social media posts of activists, and reports from the different stakeholders after and during the revolution time and to a closer date to today gave me the holistic vision.

In chapter two, I looked to specify the youth and CSOs perception vis a vis their situation in the country and to public institutions. The investigation showed clearly that the systematic oppression and practices of the state since the Ben Ali regime have harmed the perception of youth today. The economic, political, and social changes in Tunisia that followed the uprising are just one challenge that youth are facing today. Eleven years after the Revolution were followed by eleven major governmental changes. This political instability caused mixed feelings for Tunisians, to question themselves and to wonder how far these progress activities have come. The feeling was that the revolution was just stolen from them, or was a fictive illusion. This in turn resulted in youth escaping reality through drugs, immigration, and religious extremism. Almost no single approach was implemented to contain these youth and they were from the ones calling for life, dignity, and employment to escaping the country that they sacrificed to see it free from authoritarian practices.

In the following chapter, the analyses break down the existing relationships. By detailing the bi-lateral links between the different intervenients in the ecosystem.

Youth perceived CSOs as reconnecters of the relationship between the citizens, the state, and the society during the transitional period reducing the potential for renewed conflict. Today, CSOs themselves are also facing a fluctuating relationship and turbulent accusations with youth who assured them their trust and the full responsibility to deliver their needs. The young in Tunisia during the past few years have realized that bringing about change is a very delicate issue. The research showed that, it is not necessarily the inexperience of the youth that puts a challenge to implement development reforms, but rather the stagnant ideas of the older generations, external security threats, and structural divisions that puts a challenge to the role CSOs can play now in Tunisia. These youth ended up relying on civil society groups to translate their meanings and to guard their back.

The tiredness and hopelessness of young Tunisians merged with the will to have a concrete change in their local communities allowed them to give their trust to these civil groups to carry on with the conversations with the respective public institutions. Majorly with the community of donors who shifted drastically its practices and discourses since the revolution back 2011. A shift from CSOs being a refuge for networking and creating local change to depolarization, division with no strong translative body, and corruption. On the other hand, CSOs constituted a second job market to so many active Tunisian youth and provided income generating opportunities. The case now is tricky as a lot of CSOs are shutting down and leaving the scene due to the lack of funds and the minimal sustainability and scalability schemes.

In section four and five, there will be an analysis of the community of donors' discourses. I attempt to analyze the global narratives and their linkages to the local Tunisian ecosystem. While the current bottom-up approach, was better conceived, of the latter where the approach was up-down, it is still arguably excluding and not holistic in needs assessment. Consequently, to that, certain CSOs in the non-focal point regions were excluded and could not benefit from funds nor visibility. The other scenario with the absence of any political alternative, they ended up merging in the political scene to prove themselves and to remain alive in the scene.

Finally, this study is one more effort at understanding the role of CSOs in the empowerment of youth and to have their needs better served, and how progress activities can better meet the requests of youth during this period in the history of the region and under this international structural guidance. Whether to take the approach of change through politics, or

through including youth in social activities, none of them were successful and youth were refusing and refusing even more being politically engaged, or socially committed.

In analyzing the findings with regards to studying the role of CSOs in youth inclusion reforms under the community of donors' guidance. Also investigating the challenges and the experiences of the different stakeholders of the issue such as Youth Centers, Ministry of Youth, active CSOs, donors such as USAID, implementers of donor's programs such as Search for Common Ground, and actively engaged youth. We can conclude the following:

- At the government level, there were several movements to include youth in the reforms process with emancipation programs. Thus, the question of youth involvement as an enabling factor towards a more inclusive and empowered society. Challenges on the top of them are lack of trust, bureaucracy, innovation, communication, and coordination are on the top.
- On the local level with youth centers and local municipalities, centralization and localization of resources revealed more challenges.
- Civil society had a lot of contribution in pushing public entities to adopt various structural adjustments serving the public interest. Also, reconnected the relationship between the citizens, the state, and the society in a transitional period, supporting political settlements and reducing the potential for renewed conflict. Today, CSOs themselves are also facing a fluctuating relationship and turbulent accusations with youth who assured them their trust and the full responsibility to deliver their needs.
- No united requests or body from the CSOs assuring the communication and translating the meanings from and to youth and institutions. This weakens the power structure that they do exercise.
- Activities and the implemented programs funded by the donors merely meets the local needs. These funds are reduced putting on the challenge of self-reliance from CSOs and grant hunters. It's a pressing challenge as many youths are having CSOs involvement as a source of income through such projects.

b. Recommendations

According to the findings and drawing on the analyses for a more effective role of CSOs towards a better inclusion of youth and their aspirations in the reforms. I will try to propose a set of recommendations following the needs and data collected. The recommendations seek the concept of institutionalization, which means that the inclusion of youth aspirations becomes part of the system and a sustainable process, not just related to individual efforts.

Firstly, the recommendations will make sure to involve all community sectors and layers concerned with youth issues and identify a role for each component. Based on the research outcomes, the stakeholders identified cover a wide range of civically engaged youth, CSOs, and INGOs whom – in some cases- constitute a liaison between the development partners. In addition to the government- refereeing to youth concerned public institutions and to the private sector equally. Recommendations will be drawn on two levels: Firstly, on the organizational side and second on the implementation's framework:

- **First on the organizational level:**

- It would be more holistic and inclusive to have a representation and a recognition of the views and aspirations of the youth.
- Translation those aspirations requires a better communication scheme where all parties are represented and included.
- It should establish direct youth bodies in direct communication with the youth center and public institutions. This will be an open space for youth where whenever they can channel their needs and they are taken into consideration.
- It should have more 'supervisory' control on CSOs and their work while reinforcing the ties with the bottom down layer and the local communities for more involvement.
- The introduction of a collaborative body with CSOs and active youth to build a stronger mapping system and a network of local active actors for support.

- **The implementation mechanisms:**

This is the core mechanism to implement the institutional reforms. The literature review showed a great degree of cooperation and communication. public institutions mobilizers of provisions

were proved to a certain degree; however, challenges were spotted on the implementation and the enforcement levels:

- To be inclusive after consulting with youth and CSOs representatives. By having more partnerships with local active organizations and better schemes for dialogue facilitating the communication of needs.
- To boost the trust between the different stakeholders through well studied projects and more involvement and commitment of youth tackling their real needs.
- The openness to new, innovative approaches to raise funds and to implement the projects and initiatives for better scalability and sustainability.
- More assistance and better performance for bureaucrats where youth can take a share in the introduction of new technology and tech projects.
- It should clearly reinforce the security and track the funds with adequate auditing tools not in the form of more rigid processes but in follow ups, mentoring, and assessment.
- It should clearly state who is responsible for the coordination of the overall policy or plan.

Lastly, this thesis is an attempt at diagnosis, more efforts should be exerted to translate these findings and results into practical solutions. The paper focused on the unsteady depoliticization and disenfranchisement of youth and on their experience of civil society engagement as well. My hope is that this work and the similar few ones conducted by youth themselves open more opportunities not only to discussion but to effectively implement and act. Re-evaluation the revolutionary experience – better late than never is possible. As for scholars, political actors, policy makers and development partners, it is equally an important opportunity to revisit some of their approach and some of their assumptions regarding their relationship with youth.

References

- Affan, M. (2021). *Mohammad Affan - Secularism Confronts Islamism_ Divergent Paths of Transitional Negotiations in Egypt and Tunisia*. Routledge. 10.4324/9781003228929
- Abdelrahman, M. (2013). In Praise of Organization: Egypt between Activism. *Development and change*, 569–585.
- Abdeljabar, S. (2022, March 15). Cadre au Ministère de l'Équipement. (A. Tobich, Interviewer)
- Anna Khakee & Ragnar Weilandt. (2021). Supporting democratic participation beyond democracy promotion? EU Relations with Moroccan and Tunisian civil society in the areas of trade and anti-corruption. *Mediterranean Politics*, 1-28.
- Atig, A. (2022, March 22). Tunisian Red Crescent Board member in Metouia. (A. Tobich, Interviewer)
- Barsoum, G. (2016, May). Youth-focused active labor market programmes in a constraining welfare regime: A qualitative reading of programmes in Egypt: Youth-focused active labor market programmes in Egypt. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 1.
- Barsoum, G. (2018). Can youth activation policies be central to social policies in MENA countries? *International Social Security Review*, Vol. 71.
- Belhedi, I. (2022, January 13). Search for Common Ground Country Director for Tunisia/Libya. (A. Tobich, Interviewer)
- Belschner, J. (2021). The adoption of youth quotas after the Arab uprisings. *Politics, Groups, and Identities*, 151-169.
- Boukhars, A. (2015). *The Reckoning Tunisia's Perilous Path to Democratic Stability*. Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.
- Bouazizi, A. (2022, January 22). Program Manager at 'Youtheon'. (A. Tobich, Interviewer)
- Civil society in Tunisia: from islands of resistance to tides of political change. (2019). *The Journal of North African Studies*, 2.
- Cordova, G. (2019). Challenging hegemony, imaging alternatives. Everyday youth discourses and practices of resistance in contemporary Tunisia. *The Journal of North African Studies*, 337-355.
- DESA, UN. (n.d.). *Measuring Youth Development through the indicators of the SDGs and the WPAY*. Retrieved from NDC Partnership: <https://ndcpartnership.org/toolbox/measuring-youth-development-through-indicators-sdgs-and-wpay>
- Dhahri, H. (2022, March 14). Founder of ATEJ. (A. Tobich, Interviewer)
- Dridi, O. (2022, January-March). Political advisor in one of the foreign African Embassies. (A. Tobich, Interviewer)
- Francesco Cavatorta. (2012). *Arab Spring: The Awakening of Civil society*. Dublin: IEMed.
- Factsheet Tunisia. (2014, April 04). Youth Policy in Tunisia.
- Guesmi, S. A. (2022, March 14). Design, Monitoring and Evaluation Assistant at Search for Common Ground. (A. Tobich, Interviewer)
- Hamza Meddeb. (2017). *How Europe Can Help Preserve Tunisia's Fragile Democracy*. London: European Council On Foreign relations.
- Hendrick. (2022, January 13). Search for Common Ground Program Manager for Tunisia/Libya. (A. Tobich, Interviewer)
- Houda Chograni. (2021, May 03). Tunisia's Revolution Has Neglected the Country's Youth. Retrieved from Arab Center Washington DC: <https://arabcenterdc.org/resource/tunisia-revolution-has-neglected-the-countrys-youth/>

- İşleyen, B. (2014). The European Union and neoliberal governmentality: Twinning in Tunisia and Egypt. *European Journal of International Relations*, 672–690.
- Kamel. (2022, March 22). Youth trainer and Ma3an Project participant. (A. Tobich, Interviewer).
- Kubicek, L. K. (2013). Opportunities and constraints: comparing Tunisia and Egypt to the coloured revolutions. *Journal of Applied Statistics*, 11.
- Koyro, C. K. (2014). *Towards a new partnership with societies? European civil society Cooperation after the Arab Spring- case study: Tunisia*. Chapel Hill: ProQuest LLC.
- Maalel, A. H. (2022, March 16). Founder of Brotherhood Art. (A. Tobich, Interviewer)
- Maboudi, T. (2020). Reconstituting Tunisia: Participation, Deliberation, and the Content of Constitution. *Political Research Quarterly*, 774–789.
- Mahjoubi, H. (2022, March 15). Civically engaged youth. (A. Tobich, Interviewer)
- Mansouri, F. (2020). Youth and political engagement in post-revolution Tunisia. *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 1-18.
- Mathieu Rousselin. (2017). *Who Stole the Jasmine Revolution? Stuttgart: German-Tunisian Cooperation in Higher Education*.
- Meijer, R. (2015). *Citizenship Rights and the Arab Uprisings*. The Netherlands: Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
- Mohammed. (2022, March 14). Civically engaged youth, Arab League Organization (A. Tobich, Interviewer)
- Mustafa Tagma, K. A. (2013). Taming’ Arab social movements: Exporting neoliberal governmentality. *Security Dialogue*, 375–392.
- OECD. (2017). *Towards a New Partnership with Citizens*. Paris: OECD Public Governance Review.
- OECD. (2018). *Youth Stocktaking Report*. Paris: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development.
- OECD. (2021). *Engaging Young People in Open Government*. MENA: OECD.
- Petré, C. (2015, December 18). Tunisian youth and security, five years after the revolution. *World Bank Blogs*. Retrieved April 18, 2022, from <https://blogs.worldbank.org/arabvoices/tunisian-youth-and-security-five-years-after-revolution>
- Pierre Tainturier. (2016). *Youth Inclusion through Civic Engagement in NGOs after the Tunisian Revolution*. Paris: Ecole des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales.
- Project on Middle East Democracy. (2018, June 21). *Fact Sheet – Is civil society in Tunisia Under Threat? Fact-Checking the Arguments for a New NGO Law in Tunisia*. Project on Middle East Democracy. Retrieved April 18, 2022, from <https://pomed.org/fact-sheet-is-civil-society-in-tunisia-under-threat/>
- Ragnar Weilandt. (2021). EU democracy projection in Tunisia: The case of civil society consultations. *Mediterranean Politics*, 1-23.
- Rashed. (2022, March 12). IWatch Organization . (A. Tobich, Interviewer)
- Rami (2022, March 16). Academic researcher and lecturer in Middle East politics. (A. Tobich, Interviewer)
- Samir. (2022, March 14). (A. Tobich, Interviewer)
- Súilleabháin, Y. M. (2020). Improvising Peace: Towards New Social Contracts in Tunisia. *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, 101-118.
- Soud, M. (2022, March 15). Civically active youth. (A. Tobich, Interviewer)
- Sylvie Floris. (2014). *Studies on Youth Policies in the Mediterranean Partner Countries*. Marly le Roi: Euromed Youth.

- Search for Common Ground. (n.d.). Search for Common Ground Tunisia. Search for Common Ground Tunisia. <https://www.sfcg.org/tunisia/>
- Tadamun. (2016, March 29). Tadamun. Participatory Budgeting in Tunisia: Seizing Opportunities for Municipal Civic Engagement. <http://www.tadamun.co/participatory-budgeting-tunisia-seizing-opportunities-municipal-civic-engagement/?lang=en#.Y11Shi8Rp->
- Talbi, A. (2022, January 20). Civically engaged youth. (A. Tobich, Interviewer)
- Tunisia: Youth take a stand for/against the president's decisions and watch in limbo. (2022, February 10). Arab Reform Initiative. <https://www.arab-reform.net/publication/tunisia-youth-take-a-stand-for-against-the-presidents-decisions-and-watch-in-limbo/>
- UNESCO. (2022, April 21). *Shaping a National Youth Council in Tunisia*. Retrieved from Unesco: <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/shaping-national-youth-council-tunisia>
- USAID. (n.d.). Ma3an. U.S. Embassy in Tunisia. <https://tn.usembassy.gov/embassy/tunis/usaidd-tunisia/democracy-and-governance/ma3an/>
- USAID. (2022, May 05). Democracy and Governance Unit (A. Tobich, Interviewer)
- United Nations Inter-Agency Network. (2013). Youth, Political Participation and Decision Making. United Nations Development Program.
- United Nations. (2014). Arab Middle-Class Measurement and role in driving change. Beirut: ESCWA.
- United Nations. (2009). Creating an Inclusive Society: Practical Strategies to Promote Social Integration. United Nations.
- Volpi, F. (2016). Local (R)evolutions in Tunisia: Reconstructing Municipal Political Authority. *The Middle East Journal*, 365-381.
- Volpi, F. (2015). Political developments in Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia. Berlin: German Near and Middle East Association Deutsches Orient Institut.
- World Bank. (2014, April 01). *Inclusive Youth Policy and Institutions*. Retrieved from Breaking the barriers to youth inclusion: https://www.worldbank.org/content/dam/Worldbank/document/MNA/tunisia/breaking_the_barriers_to_youth_inclusion_eng_chap6.pdf

Appendix A: Interview Questions

Interview Guiding Questions CSOs- English

What is the role of civil society Organisations in Youth Inclusion Reforms Post-Uprising Tunisia?

The purpose of this research topic is to explore **the role of civil society Organisations in Youth Inclusion Reforms Post-Uprising Tunisia**. It will try to develop a better understanding of the mechanisms by which active groups are moving and stimulating the political sphere.

*Participation in this study is voluntary. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or the loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Main context: Participants talk about their experience in civil society activities, and questions will be asked when only further clarification was needed.

- 1/ Please give a general background About your CSO: Background, previous social and political engagements, work previous and social)**
- 2/ Describe your social work activism/ involvement (when it started, When did it start, any particular reason, did you have a specific post, did that have an impact on your family, community, what was the process of collaboration)**
- 3/ Please describe how did you see the impact (who got involved, your experience in general)**
- 4/ What does it mean to you to be socially active (How do you see the situation in Tunisia before & after the revolution)?**
- 5/ Do you feel your voice was heard, impactful (please describe)**
- 6/ Have you encountered any difficulties, problems of any kind in your activism related to public and Youth reform (responsiveness)?**
- 7/ Have you worked with other CSOs? How was that cooperation? Was your work on the local and/or the national levels?**
- 8/ Please describe your previous work - if any with donors?**

Interview Guiding Questions Experts English

What is the role of civil society organizations in Youth Inclusion Reforms Post-Uprising Tunisia?

The purpose of this research topic is to explore **the role of civil society organization's in Youth Inclusion Reforms Post-Uprising Tunisia**. It will try to develop a better understanding of the mechanisms by which active groups are moving and stimulating the political sphere.

*Participation in this study is voluntary. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or the loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Main context: Participants talk about their experience in civil society activities, and questions will be asked when only further clarification was needed.

1/ Please give a general background About yourself: Academic, background, previous social and political engagements, work previous and social)

2/ How do you interpret the role of donors' community in the MENA, about any specific approaches and the types of programs implemented?

3/ Please describe how did you see the impact (who got involved, your analysis of the situation in general)

4/ What does it mean to you to be the recipient of donations/ grants for CSOs (How do you see the situation in Tunisia before & after the revolution)?

Interview Guiding Questions Youth Groups

What is the role of civil society organizations in Youth Inclusion Reforms Post-Uprising Tunisia?

The purpose of this research topic is to explore **the role of civil society organizations in Youth Inclusion Reforms Post-Uprising Tunisia**. It will try to develop a better understanding of the mechanisms by which active groups are moving and stimulating the political sphere.

*Participation in this study is voluntary. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or the loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Main context: Participants talk about their experience in civil society activities, and questions will be asked when only further clarification was needed.

1/ Please give a general background About yourself: Academic, background, previous social and political engagements, work previous and social)

2/ Describe your social work activism/ involvement (when it started, when did it start, any particular reason, did you have a specific post, did that have an impact on your family, community, what was the process of collaboration)

3/ Please describe how did you see the impact (who got involved, your experience in general)

4/ What does it mean to you to be socially active (How do you see the situation in Tunisia before & after the revolution)?

5/ Do you feel your voice was heard, impactful (please describe)

6/ Have you encountered any difficulties, problems of any kind in your activism related to public and Youth reform (responsiveness)?

7/ Have you worked with other CSOs? How was that cooperation? Was your work on the local and/or the national levels?