

Tunisia's regional inequalities of development: determinants and effects. The results of an inquiry

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to analyze the perception of development actors, concerning different aspects on unequal regional development in Tunisia (thanks to the results of an inquiry).

In the first part, we will present this inquiry and its aims. Moreover, the second part will be centered on the explications of the inquired responsables on unequal regional development in Tunisia (including political, economic, administrative factors, etc.) The last part will concern the consequences and repercussions on this unequal development (among others, political and administrative repercussions, economic and social effects, etc).

Keywords: Regional development, inequality, inquiry, perception.

Jel Classification Codes: XN1, XN2.

1. Introduction

In previous research, we have shown that despite the significant improvement in indicators in all regions (thanks to the increase in the HDI and the regression of the HPI) (Bousnina A., 2006, p.153), interregional disparities remain considerable and uneven regional development remains thorny. This inequality is attested by the persistence of the same regional typology since 1975 (if not since 1966) which favors coastal governorates to the detriment of inland areas (Bousnina A., 2012, p.293).

If this territorial dichotomy is confirmed and this geographical divide is demonstrated, our main problem and our essential concern will be, in this article, the analysis of the determinants (or explanations or factors) of unequal regional development - in particular the historical, political and economic factors - as well as the demographic and socio-economic repercussions and consequences of unequal development.

In this respect, one may wonder what are the explanations for this territorial distribution? Why has developmental policy favored some regions over others?

Finally, what are the consequences and repercussions of this uneven regional development?

To answer these questions, we will focus our interest on the results of an inquiry whose fundamental objective is to analyze the perceptions of development actors, in particular the explanations and repercussions of inequalities and regional disparities.

2-Presentation of the inquiry

2.1. The objectives of the inquiry

The fundamental objective of the inquiry is to analyze the perceptions of development actors - or more precisely of Tunisian government officials - on various aspects relating to human development and regional development. To do this, our study and our survey were based on three main themes: human development, unequal regional development and solutions to unequal development.

Among the main areas of interest of the theme relating to regional development, the aim is above all to:

- identify the perceptions of officials on regional development and on the conditions necessary for the achievement of balanced and egalitarian development
- study the explanations of the regional imbalance and the causes of its persistence (of course according to the vision of development actors)
- know the place of each region and its situation from a development point of view compared to other regions
- analyze the perception of officials regarding the consequences and repercussions of unequal regional development.

2.2. The population interviewed and the design of the sample

The population concerned by the survey is mainly made up of senior officials who hold "key positions" in central or regional administrations. The choice of these administrations is inherent in their relationship with human development and with regional development. Of course, all State administrations have a relationship - direct or indirect- with development, but certain public services have a more preponderant role in the developmentalist policy which is determined by certain particular administrations which play a decisive role in allocation of resources and the distribution of investments, particularly at the sectorial level (subsequently affecting the components of human development) and at the regional level (which has undeniable effects on regional development).

Firstly, there is the Ministry of Economic Development (MED), which is responsible for the development and coordination of overall and sectorial development strategies and policies and the implementation of development plans and economic budgets, as well as the development and monitoring of regional development policies and strategies. It is the administration which probably has the most preponderant role in the development process (human and regional) and this all the more so since it has certain directorates closely linked to development

(among others, the directorate of human resources, the infrastructure department and the regional development department) and especially certain establishments under its supervision that have a direct relationship with regional development.

These include the GCRD (General Commission for Regional Development) - covering 11 coastal governorates- and the three development offices (the South Development Office, the Center West Development Office and the the North West Development Office) who are responsible for the preparation and monitoring of regional development policies and strategies as well as the development and evaluation of regional plans. These administrations (the GCRD and the three offices) all have RDDs (Regional Development Directorates), and we can thus say that the integration of the heads of these administrations can prove to be very interesting since it is a question of releasing the perception of regional officials on regional issues.

In addition, other administrations have an important role in the development process (although this role is less than that of the MED) such as the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Ministry of Housing (notably the Department of territory).

In summary, our investigation covered:

-at the central level: the officials of the administrations in close contact with the issue of development, in particular the management of the GCRD and the senior officials of the ministries mentioned above (especially those of the MED).

-at the regional level: the various RDDs (regional development directorates) in all the governorates as well as some representatives of the governorate councils and some IPA (Industry Promotion Agency) regional directorates (and sometimes some executives from the employment directorates).

Thus, the elaboration of the sample was carried out from a sampling not based on the probability and following the procedures of itineraries, since it is about certain steps to be followed and which are necessary for the realization of survey, both at central and regional level. These are mainly the following steps:

- choose the administrations to be surveyed
- study the organization chart and eliminate the departments that are not concerned with development.
- draw up the list of officials to be investigated
- set up an appointment with the manager in question
- carry out the survey.

In total, 73 officials make up the survey sample and it can be said that this sample represents all the regions in Tunisia, as shown in the following table:

Table 1: Distribution of sample managers at the central level

Place of work	Number
Ministry of Economic Development MED	17
GCRD (General Commission for Regional Development)	3
Ministry of Equipment	1
Ministry of Social Affairs	4
Total	25

Table 2: Distribution of sample managers by region (at regional level):

Governorate	Number
District of Tunis	8
North East	5
North West	11
Center East	10
Center West	6
South East	5
South West	3
Total	48

2.3. Survey protocol

In order to facilitate the collection of information, we used the method of interview with direct and centered questions. This formula has several advantages since it allows you to contact the person concerned directly to collect the information sought. In addition, the interview is characterized by its "flexibility" since it allows the interviewer to explain what is ambiguous and to have all the answers and to complete the incomplete ones through verbal communication and the report between the two parties (the interviewer and the respondent). In addition, communication allows the interviewer to convince the respondent of the importance of research and its contribution at the scientific and socio-economic level, which could further motivate the respondent and thus facilitate the collection of information.

On the other hand, given that our sample is essentially made up of officials from the Tunisian administration, these interviewees are always involved in work situations, whether directly or indirectly (active or passive). For this, the type of interview used is the focused interview (the "focused interview") which "consists of focusing the attention of the interviewees on a given situation [...] while the interviewer tries to concentrate the attention of the interviewee to the central theme of each part of the questionnaire; Panel techniques are incompatible with the very nature of the sample which does not allow continuous series of interviews" (Sahbani A., 1988, p.266).

3. The determinants and causes of unequal regional development

The explanations and causes of regional disparities are multiple and they simultaneously affect the historical, social, political and economic. In addition to the historical factor (inherent in the colonial order which shaped the space), the political factor was decisive because of the ambivalent action of the State which sometimes contributed to aggravate the gaps and to accentuate the disparities in particular in areas relating to production (more particularly tourism and industry) by strengthening certain regions at the expense of others. The political choices have also instrumentalized the recommended economic solutions which have consecrated the primacy of the liberal choice and the logic of the market.

These general considerations on the reasons for regional inequality are supplemented by the results of the survey whose fundamental objective here will be to analyze the perception of development actors on the causes and factors of unequal regional development.

3.1. The political factor

The political explanations for uneven development are multiple and they concern first of all the absence (or the slowness) of decentralization or - in the words of one official interviewed - "the importance of political centralization". This centralization does not value the contribution of regional managers and "eliminates, from any real participation in decision-making, all those who are in direct and permanent contact with the basic data of the deep realities; the choice is always the result of the intentions and the will of the high authorities, which left the development project very manageable and having different axes which can be eliminated in part or in whole or even reformed according to the situation" (Ibid, p.347).

According to some officials interviewed, "the slow emergence of civil society" may explain the uneven regional development. Indeed, "the central state, in a dependent society, is far from being the emanation of civil society [...], this trend does not favor regionalization, on the contrary. However, the region is a life, a life is defined by power, which implies the delegation of power to the regional authority" [in the case of Tunisia, and in most underdeveloped countries], the State, often centralized, contributed to evacuate the [regional] question, to reduce it to a problem of optimization, localization or to a simple question of social equity [...], can the regional question be dissociated from the nature power and social formation? To what extent can we speak of a region in the context of a highly centralized power that even denies its existence as it denies that of classes and civil society?" (Belhedi A., 1996a, p.101).

On the other hand, some officials considered that political centralization was at the origin of the dysfunction of the various institutions and subsequently of the difficulties of the developmental experience and of social and regional inequalities. In fact, the institutional dysfunction is expressed by a game of alliance which "was noticed within the political formation, at all levels, even within the administrations and the parties; we no longer hide the game of clans and restricted groups [...], it is a balance of power between the different poles in power, it is no longer a question of national unity, of general interest [...], it is rather the particular interests, the interests of the small groups which dominate (according to Duvignaud, we can speak about social anomie which reflects the failure of a project and even its abortion)." (Sahbani A., 1988, p.378).

Political centralization and the dysfunction of institutions can explain - in the opinion of several officials surveyed - "poor planning" or "the discontinuity of socio-economic choices and the absence of a development strategy". Socio-political precariousness and the discontinuity of choices are expressed by "the frequent

change of officials, the creation of new ministries, splitting, unification and even the outright elimination of a ministerial department. Each leader presents a program, and from the start, we consider what is previous as unsuitable, and so on [...]. If regional imbalance is one of the problems of development [...], how to annihilate it while the development process is in crisis and that we try to limit the anomalies by small reforms or emergency solutions (for example, youth employment, short-term employment sites, etc.)?" (*Ibid*, pp. 348-351).

In addition, other political determinants of unequal development have been mentioned by development actors, and they concern in particular "the priorities of the government and the public authorities" (and their preferences or their orientation towards the coastal regions) and "affiliation of political leaders" (or the geographical origin of the holders of "sensitive" political posts, often from the coasts). These two reasons alone account for more than 31% of responses. This is an unmistakable relationship between "spatial inertia" (or unequal regional development) and "social inertia" which means that the strata (or social classes) that hold power and capital are concentrated in the central spaces.

What is remarkable here is the importance of these two factors (the priority of the government and the affiliation of the political leaders) in the responses of the regional leaders (compared to the central actors). Out of 24 responses, 18 responses (i.e. $\frac{3}{4}$) come from regional actors, which reflects the importance of the political dimension and of "social inertia" at the regional level, and this all the more so since central officials do not are not marginalized and that their contribution is generally valued.

All of the political explanations for unequal development are summarized in the following table:

Table 3: Political explanations of unequal regional development

Answer	Number			
	AC	AR ¹	Total	%
No or slow decentralization	6	5	11	14,3
Government and authority priorities	4	8	12	15,6
Dysfunction of institutions	1	1	2	2,6
State withdrawal	1	-	1	1,3
Membership of political leaders (political positions and the elite originating from the coasts)	2	10	12	15,6
The weakness – or even the total absence – of the political opposition	2	1	3	3,9
Poor planning	2	-	2	2,6
“Absence” of political reflection on the matter	2	-	2	2,6
Corruption	-	1	1	1,3
Political isolation of the region	-	1	1	1,3

¹ For this table and for all the following tables in this section: AR means: Regional Administration, i.e. the RDDs and others (IPA, employment department, etc.); Total: all of the answers; AC: Central administration.

No answer	9	21	30	41,1
Total	29	48	77	100%

Source: Personal inquiry

Finally, we should note the too high proportion of “No answer” (more than 40%). In reality, our information collection encountered many difficulties and certain problems, such as the absence of some managers (who were replaced by those who succeed them hierarchically) and above all the refusal to cooperate of several managers who are characterized by a behavior fearful of the objectives of the investigation, considering certain data confidential or “sensitive” from a political point of view. This explains the importance of the share of "non-responses" in several tables and in particular in those relating to political factors and also to the political repercussions of unequal development (the share of "non-responses" is greater than 45%).

3.2. Economic determinants

The unequal regional development is determined by many economic causes linked in particular - according to a large proportion of the officials interviewed - to the "absence (or weakness) of private investment" and "disengagement of the State" ' following the adoption of the neoliberal path. This external factor (to the regions) has become a primary determinant of regional imbalance: "With technological capitalism, the society-space relationship no longer has a privileged character: the determination and differentiation of space are no longer endogenous, under the effect of local, spontaneous and mastered techniques. This relationship depends more and more on an external determination: space becomes a simple product. Space is differentiated for its capital load, for its possibilities of profit and surplus value. This differentiation escapes local society; it is speculative and global, imposed and external” (Belhedi A., 1996a, p.61).

Moreover, the disengagement of the state explains this neglect of regional planning and the fact that inequality “is no longer at the center of concerns as before, insofar as it assumed a strong interventionist state and the importance of transfer providing regulation. The new discourse legitimizes another development scheme according to the intrinsic data and potential of each region. **This schema no longer questions spatial inequality, it even legitimizes it”** (Belhedi A., 1996b, pp.9-52).

On the other hand and as previously pointed out, the impact of liberalism is linked to the extraversion of the Tunisian economy and to the problem of cumulative market disparities inherent in the importance of the starting conditions. These conditions are determined – according to several development actors – by the volume and “orientation of public investments and by the importance of the region’s infrastructure”. In this regard, the action of the public authorities has been truly ambivalent, since it has often led to very contradictory results and has often been the cause of uneven regional development. Indeed, the State's contribution to the fight against regional imbalance has been a relatively successful operation in terms of social services (education, health, etc.), cultural services, basic

infrastructure, the fight against poverty or the realization of certain state industrial or tourism projects... On the other hand, state intervention has sometimes contributed to aggravating the gaps and accentuating the disparities, particularly in areas relating to production (more particularly tourism and industry) by strengthening certain (coastal) regions at the expense of others (in this case inland Tunisia).

In this respect, the problem of the distribution of investments was fundamental, since investment (which is the essential determinant of most socio-economic indicators relating to employment, standard of living, etc.) was distributed from a very unequal way on the Tunisian territory, and this, to the detriment of the interior regions and in favor of the coastal axis (grouping the District of Tunis, the Center East, the North East and the "South coast" i.e. d. Gabes and Medenine).

Despite the fact that the regional problem has been taken into account for several decades (a complete chapter was devoted to it in the Vth Plan), and despite the relative improvement on the part of the interior areas (compared to the first decade after independence), the pre-eminence of the coast remains indisputable since its share often exceeds 65% of all public investments. This share was unstable and fluctuated between 75% during the 1960s and 60% during the 8th and 9th Plans. Nevertheless, the inequality persists, it has even worsened since the coastal regions currently concentrate 65% of public investments whereas this share was 60% between 1992 and 2001.

Table 4: Distribution (in %) of public investments between the coast and the interior (1962-2006)

Period	Coast	Interior
1962-1971	75,6	24,4
4e Plan (72-76)	75,6	24,4
5e Plan (77-81)	64,2	35,8
6e Plan (82-86)	71,9	28,1
7e Plan (87-91)	66,9	33,1
8e Plan (92-96)	60,5	39,5
9e Plan (97-2001)	59,4	40,6
10e Plan (2002-2006)	65,1	34,9

Source: A. Belhedi (1996) and MED: 9th and 10th Development Plans.

In short, the distribution of public investments has been very unequal on the Tunisian territory because of their concentration on the coast (which has often drained at least 2/3 of them), and this, despite the relative improvement of the part of inland regions. This geographical dichotomy is even more flagrant for the distribution of private investments which are generally concentrated in the North-East (NEAT including the District of Tunis) and in the Center-East, as shown in the following table:

Table 5: Distribution of private investments during the last four development plans

Region	D.Tunis	NE	NEAT	NW	CE	CW	SE	SW	South	Tunisia
7th Plan	1087,5	692,5	1 780	353	1 314,1	215,9	460,6	193,3	653,9	4317,2
7th plan %	25,2	16,04	41,2	8,2	30,4	5,0	10,7	4,5	15,1	100
8th Plan	1198,4	705,1	1 903,5	383	1170	277	467	181	648,2	8582,2
8th Plan %	27,3	16,1	43,4	8,7	26,7	6,3	10,7	4,1	14,8	100
9th Plan	-	-	4 207	1 434,6	2 784,9	1 303,7	-	-	1 692,8	11423
9th Plan %	-	-	36,8	12,6	24,4	11,4	-	-	14,8	100
10th Plan	-	-	8 862	1 234	5 398,7	1 443,5	-	-	3090	20028,2
10th Plan %	-	-	44,2	6,2	27	7,2	-	-	15,4	100

Source: A. Belhedi (1996) and MED: 8th, 9th and 10th Development Plans.

With the exception of the 9th Plan (where it was close to 61%), the share of the North-East and the Center-East -in which almost all the coastal regions are located (except Medenine and Gabes)- exceeded 71% (paradoxically, the area of these two regions does not exceed 17%), while it did not reach 14% in the other two regions of the West (the North-West and the Center-West). Unlike public investment (the State has sought to reduce its concentration by improving the share of inland regions), there is a relative stability of private investment, which is often attracted by the more developed coastal areas. This concentration is easy to explain, because it is inherent in the “cumulative disparities of the market” and the close link between the private sector and the law of the market.

Thus, this ambivalent action of the State has strengthened certain regions to the detriment of others, in particular because of the tourist and industrial development which has not been equally distributed over the Tunisian territory; and despite the decentralization effort, "it is not all of Tunisian society that can benefit equitably from economic transformations, but those who were already willing to do so, that is to say once again the large urban centers and the coastal zone; it is there that the greatest industrial and tourist achievements are located. The interior is experiencing a significant void, accentuated in recent years by emigration and rural exodus” (Bouhdiba A., 1978, p.196).

These "achievements" and these investments -public and private constitute the primary determinants (at the economic level) of regional inequality (moreover, these are the two causes most cited by the officials surveyed), since investment is the essential determinant of the whole socio-economic dynamic and of the unequal development of the regions.

In this respect, public investments have been decisive in providing certain regions with socio-collective facilities and infrastructure, which probably constituted the essential determinant of the orientation of private investments

because of the primacy of the initial conditions for the investors and the importance of infrastructure for entrepreneurs.

Already in **1966**, the concentration of public investments was very clear, and the study of investments (mentioned in the Three-Year Plan and the Plan's implementation reports) shows that the **5 coastal governorates** (Tunis, Bizerte, Nabeul, Sousse and Sfax which extend over 30% of the area) monopolized 73% of the total investments, including 78% of industrial investments and 77% of tourist investments: in spite of the awareness of the regional problem and the desire to give it solutions, it is not the plan that will break the hegemony of the coastal fringe and it is thus necessary to understand the denial that the facts impose on political objectives and the inertia imposed by daily reality (Aydalot P., 1966, pp.79-81).

On the other hand, and in addition to economic priorities, the orientation of public and private investments and inadequate infrastructure, other economic determinants of uneven regional development were cited by the various officials surveyed, as the following table shows:

Table 6: Economic explanations of uneven regional development

Answer	Number			
	AC	AR	Total	%
Lack of private investment	7	10	17	18,7
Limited resources	1	-	1	1,1
Priorities and economic choices	4	3	7	7,7
Economic disintegration (or failure of economic activities)	2	5	7	7,7
Tourist facilities and services	3	3	6	6,6
Inadequate infrastructure	2	9	11	12,1
The rapprochement between the coast and the economic poles	1	2	3	3,3
Orientation of public investments	5	12	17	18,7
The economic capacities of each region	-	3	3	3,3
State disengagement	2	-	2	2,2
Misuse of resources	-	2	2	2,2
No response	4	11	15	16,5
Total	31	60	91	100%

Source: Personal inquiry

3.3. Administrative causes

Contrary to the multiple political and economic explanations, the administrative determinants of regional inequalities are not numerous and are linked - according to most of the officials surveyed (30 responses) - to "administrative slowness" and above all to "administrative centralization", which is "at the origin of the failure to take into account the real needs of the regions".

In this regard, several officials have repeatedly mentioned the problem of autonomy for regional and local decision-makers. This "administrative centralization" (and this "primacy of the national level") is inherent in historical and political explanations, considering that national integration can negate the regional problem, and that the Nation-State "constitutes the basis of national organization while the region finds itself devoid of this quality and subordinated to

the national order. From this perspective, the region is perceived only as a place of maximization of national investments, a strong point of the national space that should be strengthened, an obstacle to growth that urgently needs to be helped, or an area of tension that is to defuse. Thus, policies, actions and regional planning have been guided by this imperative. Indeed, any reconsideration of the region as a distinct entity leads to a phenomenon of power, that calls into question that of the state” (Belhedi A., 1996a, p.92).

Moreover, this centralization constituted a real blockage not only for the region, but also for society as a whole. It is a question of a "unitary will of the social" which wanted "to ensure the triumph of national unity at all costs [...], and which implies that any idea or any tendency towards the struggle of the classes. Anything that could engage Tunisian society in the direction of divergence or differentiation into social classes is perceived as a desire to divide the nation and as a mortal danger” (Bouhdiba A., 1978, p.186).

On the other hand, some surveyed officials linked the unequal development to other administrative explanations, related in particular to “the incompetence of the staff” and to the “quality of the human resources” working in the regions. These staff are often content with “desktop planning instead of field work, which does not facilitate effective planning and detailed knowledge of [regional] reality; this is why developmental action must be practical and on the ground and it is necessary to review the training of “development actors” and human resources and the adequacy of this training with the regional reality” (Ouannes M., 1992, p.195).

The role of the administrative staff is called into question by several officials surveyed who mention the slowness of the procedures, the incompetence of the human resources and their demotivation, as shown in the following table:

Table 7: Administrative causes of unequal regional development

Answer	Number			
	AC	AR	Total	%
Administrative centralization (and administrative slowness)	14	16	30	41,1
Demotivation	1	2	3	4,1
Importance and number of procedures	1	1	2	2,7
Lack of skills and bureaucracy	1	6	7	9,6
The distribution of competent personnel	-	3	3	4,1
No response	8	20	28	38,4
Total	25	48	73	100%

Source: Personal inquiry

3.4. Social determinants

The social explanations for unequal development are linked - according to many officials interviewed - to regional differences in terms of the level of education of the population and literacy (or schooling). As previously noted, these regional disparities reflect a geographical divide between the coast and the interior, with literacy rates - especially for women - significantly higher than the national average in the coastal regions, unlike the interior regions. The same goes for interregional disparities in terms of: the level of education of the population, academic success,

vocational training, etc., reflecting considerable differences between the coastal border and the interior of the country.

The "over-qualification" of this coastal axis explains the concentration of qualified personnel in this axis which attracted more than 80% of the senior executives, while the most disadvantaged governorates (North-West and Center-West) retain only 15 % of qualified employed population.

The favored coastal regions thus have more senior executives "who form a kind of lobby within the central power and who have weight within the central administrations, which has enabled them to pay particular attention to their place of origin [...], a region that participates in the training of young people only to profit from it later is a region in crisis; its (human) investments are profitable elsewhere; the element of imbalance is thus acquired from the start; other factors then intervene to reinforce it"(Sahbani A., 1988, pp. 315-316).

This "socio-cultural backwardness" of certain regions has created a mentality which is "behind" the aspirations of the planners, a mentality which has not assimilated the paths of development and which has not "internalized" the spirit and methods of development. This behavior and this mentality of the population (mentioned 14 times by the respondents) - which do not facilitate the realization of development - are combined with a flagrant weakness of private initiative linked to "the fear of entrepreneurs" to invest in disadvantaged regions (qualified as "region at risk"). Indeed, "some entrepreneurs from these regions prefer to invest elsewhere, some others rather prefer to keep their money [...], a set of judgments have appeared to label the currently disadvantaged regions as "region at risk", hence the flight and underestimation. The internalization of this behavior and its translation in the region has generated the imbalance and the false consciousness of the populations of these regions (investing in the coastal regions, studying there, working there...) which has forged an anti-development behavior" (Ibid, p.314).

As such, this social explanation of unequal development, linked to the mentality of the population, has sometimes been explicitly cited by some officials who have said - very clearly - that the dynamism of certain regions (in this case the Center East) is determined by "their dynamic and enterprising population", while some RDD officials in the West felt that the population is "passive, lazy" and "unwilling to work despite wealth and resources enjoyed by the interior regions.

In addition, other social determinants are cited to explain unequal regional development, as shown in the following table:

Table 8: Social explanations of unequal regional development

Answer	Number			
	AC	AR	Total	%
Low workforce training	5	10	15	19,7
Mentality of the population	3	11	14	18,4
Relative poverty	1	1	2	2,6
Lack of solidarity between inhabitants	1	-	1	1,3
Internal migration and rural exodus	5	3	8	10,5
Lack of initiative	3	4	7	9,2

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The demographic weight of coastal regions (significance of demand)	2	2	4	5,2
No answer	8	17	25	32,9
Total	28	48	76	100%

Source: Personal inquiry

3.5. Natural and historical factors

If development is inherently unequal (since the spaces do not contain the same resources and wealth), the perception of the importance of natural factors is different according to the vision of the person surveyed. Some interviewees felt that the natural environment was sometimes constraining because of unfavorable physical and natural conditions for some regions (for example, "certain inland regions are mountainous while the eastern border benefited from its coastal axis, coasts, the beach... which has positively affected tourism").

On the other hand, other officials have a diametrically opposed perception, believing that the natural potential and wealth are abundant in the interior regions, particularly in the North-West and the Center-West, but in reality it is a "mismanagement of natural resources" (in the words of one official, "Tunisia's water reserve is the North-West and the potential and wealth of this region are not exploited by its human resources"). This vision corroborates the analysis of several specialists in the field. According to A.Belhedi, "the weaker man's control over his environment, the more the influence of nature is such that it shapes the landscape, the farming systems, the habitat and the ways of life" (Belhedi A., 1996a, p.101).

This demonstrates very clearly the importance of the human factor in relation to the natural factor, because "the control of nature only makes sense in a society that controls its reproduction, and the natural environment, although very constraining, comes second order in this attempt at liberation [...]. The main constraints are water and soil on which man can intervene. Rational exploitation is another way of developing weak potential [...]. Everything contributes to refuting natural determinism (which would condemn the South or the Center). History has clearly shown that the flourishing periods corresponded to the integration of these spaces" (Belhedi A., 1992a, pp.11-14).

Table 9: "Natural" explanations of unequal regional development

Answer	Number			
	AC	AR	Total	%
Unfavorable physical and natural conditions	8	11	19	26
Geographical location and relief	3	10	13	17,8
Mismanagement of natural resources	3	11	14	19,2
Proximity to the sea and coasts	1	4	5	6,8
No answer	10	12	22	30,1
Total	25	48	73	100%

Source: Personal inquiry

On the other hand, with regard to the historical factor, and as previously pointed out, different historical considerations favored the hegemony of the petty bourgeoisie and created a relationship between "spatial inertia" (or uneven regional

development) and "social inertia" (this relationship causes the strata – or social classes – that hold power and capital to concentrate in central spaces).

In addition, the colonial structure contributed to the consolidation of certain cities (in particular the coastal ports) which participate most in the colonial economy, unlike the other interior regions which are now dominated by the eastern facade. Indeed, the colonial pact reinforced the economic and human concentration on the coast thanks to the massive exploitation of fertile land and mineral wealth exported to France and elsewhere, which explains the essential role of "modern" seaports (Tunis -La Goulette, Bizerte, Sousse and Sfax) (Sethom H., 1992, p.181). In addition, "this policy relied on land transport routes and especially on the railways to collect agricultural and mining products for export and to distribute imported goods" (Ibid, p.182). This is combined with the creation in the city-ports of modern industries and the development of the administrative sector, social services and equipment.

This vision is confirmed by the perception of many development actors (18 responses) who considered "the colonial period" as being one of the factors of unequal development and who considered that "inequality is inherited of the colonial period". In fact, the colonial space "is governed by an extrovert structure and is very unevenly occupied or enhanced"; the colonial economy contributed to aggravate the imbalances by integrating only the spaces coveted by colonial interests: "The space which benefited the most from the colonial order is the coast, home of peasant agriculture strongly structured in towns. These centers were not directly affected by colonization and saw the development of social services and modern equipment [...]. In the interior, colonization gave rise either to a vacuum [...], or to mining enclaves west fed by the rural exodus" (Ibid, p.24). In addition, the impact of colonization was linked to demographic factors inherent in the attractive power of Europeans concentrated in the main coastal regions. Indeed, "the geographical distribution of investments makes it possible to understand the polarizing power of the European population: it had capital and engaged in investment, it procured employment, it concentrated the infrastructure around it, correctly organized the teaching, but for the benefit of those who lived in its orbit. Both public and private investments were oriented according to the needs which were rarely those of Tunisians, which was not without consequence on their localization (Aydalot P., 1966, p.72).

In addition, other historical explanations are cited by some officials, such as the concentration of activities and industrial zones on the coastal axis or -according to the terms of some interviewees- "the national division of labor" (according to which the 'unequal development is explained, historically, "by the dependence of certain regions on certain activities", such as "the dependence of Gafsa on the phosphate company" or "the dependence of the North -West on agricultural activity").

Table 10: Historical causes of uneven regional development

Answer	Number			
	AC	AR	Total	%
Migratory movement	1	2	3	4,1
Level of education (previous generations)	2	-	2	2,7
The concentration of industrial and tourist areas on the coast	5	6	11	15,1
The colonial period	6	12	18	24,7
The international division of labor (and sometimes the national division of labor)	1	4	5	6,8
No response	10	24	34	46,6
Total	25	48	73	100

Source: Personal inquiry

4. The repercussions and effects of unequal regional development

The repercussions of unequal regional development are multiple and concern above all the demographic effects and the socio-economic effects. At the demographic level, the unequal regional development can induce a demographic imbalance which manifests itself through human concentration and especially internal migration towards the most developed coastal regions which become very attractive, unlike the repulsive interior regions. At the socio-economic level, unequal development can generate a concentration of jobs, wealth and investment (private in particular) and above all industrial polarization and a massive concentration of tourist services on the eastern side.

These general considerations on the effects of regional inequality are supplemented by the results of the survey whose fundamental objective here will be to analyze the perception of development actors on the repercussions of unequal regional development. This is what we will discuss in the following paragraphs.

4.1. Political and administrative repercussions

At the political and administrative level, most of the responses (from the officials surveyed) revolve around political and administrative centralization and above all concern the "lack of credibility" of the administrative and political system, and the population's dissatisfaction with to system performance. In the words of one of the development actors, it is "the multiplication of criticisms against the State and rather a poor appreciation of the political regime". According to other officials, "it is a lack of trust between officials and citizens", especially in disadvantaged regions where socio-economic services are not satisfactory.

Of course, this "lack of confidence" and "this dissatisfaction of the population" (as well as political centralization) are inherent to unequal development, because "the survival of regional imbalance (which implies a form of blockage of development) did not allow a significant evolution of the political system. The persistence of political paternalism has reinforced the monopolization of the prerogatives of action and decision-making in the same structures and almost according to the same methods (openness and participation remain problematic) [...]. The regional power is aware that its field of application is limited since it is mainly an instrument of central power" (Sahbani A., 1988, pp. 405-406).

Faced with unequal development and persistent regional disparities, the perception of development actors and the population (as to the role of the State) often appears contradictory and ambivalent. Indeed, “we perceive the State as sometimes unjust (and favoring certain regions at the expense of others), and at the same time the only refuge for development. Sometimes, the imbalance and disparities become “local phenomena” when the population of the interior regions complains about the unequal chances of development between the coast and the interior or between the urban and rural areas. The image of the state is linked to the demand of the population for a more egalitarian distribution of wealth [...], and more and more productive projects (and not only socio-collective services)” (Boutaleb M.N.,2002, p.487).

On the other hand, many officials surveyed cited other administrative and political repercussions of uneven development. At the political level, reference has sometimes been made to the disinterestedness - particularly that of executives - of political life and the “political isolation” of certain inland regions (due to the “political influence” of coastal regions). At the administrative level, mention was made above all of "the poor performance of the administration", "unsatisfactory services", delays, demotivation, bureaucracy, communication problems... Responses are summarized in the following two tables:

Table 11: The political repercussions of unequal regional development

Answer	Number			
	AC	AR	Total	%
Political centralization (and political “exclusion”)	3	10	13	17,3
Lack of credibility	1	2	3	4
Turbulence and political instability (and public dissatisfaction)	5	11	16	21,3
Lack of supervision	1	-	1	1,3
Tensions and the spirit of “regionalism”	1	-	1	1,3
Disinterest in political life	1	1	2	2,6
“Political isolation” of certain regions	1	2	3	4
The increase in corruption	1	1	2	2,6
No response	11	23	34	45,3
Total	25	50	75	100%

Source: Personal inquiry

Table 12: The administrative repercussions of uneven regional development

Answer	Number			
	AC	AR	Total	%
No administrative decentralization	7	8	15	20,5
Communication problem and complexity of monitoring administrative files	2	3	5	6,8
Demotivation and bureaucracy	3	1	4	5,5
Unsatisfactory services, congestion, delay, poor performance of the administration...	8	10	18	24,6
No response	5	26	31	42,5
Total	25	48	73	100%

Source: Personal inquiry

4.2. Economic and social repercussions

Often, the main repercussions of unequal regional development concern above all the socio-demographic effects (in particular the concentration of the population and internal migration) and the socio-economic effects (such as the concentration of investments, jobs and wealth, the concentration of industry and the concentration of tourism).

In this paragraph, we will try to analyze the perception of development actors regarding the economic and social repercussions of unequal development:

- At the economic level

In addition to the concentration of wealth and production, the various officials surveyed believe that the regional imbalance has generated "increased unemployment and weak activity in the interior regions". The weakness of employment, the increase in unemployment and the decline in the standard of living constitute nearly 30% of the responses.

This perception of development actors can be corroborated by statistical indicators. Indeed, the uneven regional development and the coastal/inland geographical dichotomy have had a significant impact on employment and economic activity, due to the concentration of activities and employment in privileged regions. The latter often have a relatively low unemployment rate, whereas this rate exceeds 20% - and sometimes 30% - in most interior governorates. In addition, "developed" coastal regions are characterized by the importance of secondary and tertiary activities; and we note the very clear concentration of industrial activities and services in the coastal axis, which brought together more than 80% of industrial jobs and more than 76% of jobs in services; in other words, this coastal area - which extends over only almost a quarter of the territory - concentrates more than three quarters of secondary and tertiary jobs.

In addition, some officials interviewed insisted on the importance of the geographical divide between the different regions and on "the underdevelopment of several interior regions". In this regard, some respondents spoke about "**center and periphery**", believing – like several authors – that extraversion (and the cumulative causalities of the market) favor the center. Indeed, "the centers - characterized by greater productivity, high remuneration of the factors of production, strong internalization of externalities and notable economies of scale - attract flows towards them and create a vacuum [...]. Overestimated profitability of the center(s) plays against the periphery where the opportunities are often little or badly perceived, due to the absence of information, the inadequacy of the equipment and above all the comparative advantages" (Belhedi A., 1996a, p.95).

Already in 1966, we were talking about this imbalance between the center and the periphery, which shows the acuteness and persistence of "*spatial inertia*". *Ph. Aydalot spoke in 1966 of a "coastal crescent from Bizerte to Sfax, which represents the key region for the Tunisian economy [...].* This growing regional imbalance is

reaching proportions that mortgage the future development of the country. The progressive abandonment of the Center and the South, the continuous thrust towards the North-East represent an essential characteristic of the Tunisian economy" (Aydalot P., 1966, pp.65-67).

This "regional imbalance" (or this "relative underdevelopment of several regions") and "the unequal distribution of wealth" are considered, by nearly 40% of respondents, as the repercussions or the most important economic effects of regional inequality. In fact, the unequal regional development and the growing disparities have generated undeniable socio-economic repercussions which are expressed by the centralization of investments and by the industrial and tourist concentration on a small part of the Tunisian territory.

The coastal concentration of industry is a direct consequence of the unequal regional development, because the industrial sector remains closely linked to equipment and socio-collective services (in the field of transport, telecommunications, etc.). Given its "overdevelopment" compared to the interior, the eastern coast subsequently became the main – if not the only – industrial area of the country.

Despite all the industrial development efforts, the imbalance remains flagrant and industrial centralization remains very clear in favor of the coastal axis. Indeed, industrialization during the cooperative period was characterized by a "concentrated diffusion" and by an extension of the industrial space beyond Tunis (formerly the only industrial center) but it is an extension which benefited the coast (notably Bizerte and Gabes) and which very rarely affected the interior regions. Economic liberalization since the 1970s will reinforce this coastal concentration, although it has contributed to a very great diffusion of industry and the creation of a real industrial space, but which remains limited to the eastern coastal strip.

The indicators that confirm the concentration of the industry are very numerous. If we refer to very recent figures, we can show the industrial regional imbalance thanks to 3 main indicators: industrial zones, number of companies and employment.

Firstly, the concentration of industrial zones remains very clear to the detriment of interior zones where the number of zones remains very small and above all the surface area is limited (Le Kef: 34 ha and Jendouba: 36 ha) unlike the coastal regions where there is a diversity of industrial zones which often extend over a very large area (Tunis: 273 ha, Nabeul: 145 ha, Sousse: 348 ha and especially Ben Arous: 2002 ha).

Secondly, and because of the concentration of industrial zones, the coast monopolizes "the lion's share" in terms of businesses and employment. In 2003, for example, nearly 75% of industrial units were concentrated in two regions of the country: the North East (including the capital) and the Center East (the Sahel and Sfax). **In 2011, IPA data shows that more than 84% of businesses are**

concentrated in these two regions (which cover only 17% of the country's land area) and that the coastline continues to attract almost 90% projects.

In terms of industrial employment, it is obvious to note the centralization of secondary activities, centralization inherent in the concentration of industrial zones and companies. According to data from the GPHC, the coastal area accounts for more than three quarters of industrial jobs (nearly 80%) with, of course, the clear domination of the North East and the Center East which concentrate more than 71% of secondary jobs.

The increased “littoralization” of employment has been beneficial especially in the Sahel, which has benefited from massive industrial investments and which has experienced a general spread of industry, particularly from the 1970s; the Sahel has seen its share of industrial employment increase significantly to reach more than 20% in 2004 (against 13% in 1973) unlike the capital, whose share fell from 54% to 22.6% between 1973 and 2004.

Like industrial polarization, the development of the tourism sector has been limited to certain coastal areas and has very rarely affected the interior of the country. Tourism concentration is a direct consequence of government action and tourism development for many reasons. Indeed, the strengthening of the coastal axis has been observed since the sixties and especially after 1970 with the establishment of 4 priority zones which are - all - coastal regions (Tunis, Nabeul-Hammamet, Sousse-Monastir and Zarzis-Jerba) and which were endowed with significant infrastructure, particularly in terms of services, equipment, roads and airports. Tourism investments have been concentrated, at more than 90%, in the coastal areas and the role of the State has been essential in strengthening the eastern axis. After the disengagement of the State, especially from the 1980s, the concentration will worsen further with the development of the private sector which will invest almost exclusively on the eastern coast.

This regional imbalance has resulted in a tourist concentration in favor of the eastern facade. The main tourist towns brought together almost all the hotels (in particular classified hotels) while this number did not exceed 10 in the interior regions against more than 100 in the tourist centers (148 in Nabeul, 123 in Medenine (Djerba), 125 in Sousse and 99 in Tunis).

Tourist investments are often monopolized by these major centers, and during the last decade, the 4 tourist “centers” (in this case Tunis, Nabeul, Sousse-Monastir and Medenine) have attracted nearly 75% of tourist investments.

Table 13: The economic repercussions of uneven regional development

Answer	Number			
	AC	AR	Total	%
Low income and declining standard of living	4	6	10	11,2
Unemployment	7	9	16	18,0
Relative underdevelopment of several regions (or regional imbalance)	8	20	28	31,5
Insufficient infrastructure	2	2	4	44,9

Tunisia's regional inequalities of development: determinants and effects. The results of an inquiry

Lack of competitiveness of the regional economy and businesses in the different regions	1	2	3	3,4
Unequal distribution of wealth	1	6	7	7,86
Under-exploitation of the country's economic potential	1	2	3	3,4
Development of the informal sector	-	1	1	1,1
No response	4	13	17	19,1
Total	28	61	89	100%

Source: Personal inquiry

This inertia of the Tunisian space for more than 60 years and this persistent regional imbalance are fraught with threats for the future of the country: "If things continue to evolve according to the same model, it is very likely that the Eastern Littoral will be increasingly overpopulated and overloaded with polluting industrial activities and its vegetable and tree lands will give way to urban constructions, and the interior regions will be increasingly threatened with economic and demographic stagnation or decline, and possibly depopulation" (Sethom H., 1992, p.225).

This problem of depopulation was already observed during the last GPHC, which shows the importance of the social repercussions of unequal development.

- At the social level

Among the social effects cited by the various officials surveyed, we find the imbalance in the distribution of the population and even the depopulation of certain interior regions (the population growth, between 1994 and 2004 for example, is negative in the North West and is equal to -0.45 in Siliana, -0.51 in Kef and -0.1 in the North West).

This depopulation and this negative demographic growth recorded in some governorates - contrary to the positive balance of the coastal regions - can be determined by two factors: fertility and internal migration. Since differences in natural population growth are small, interregional differences and uneven population growth can be determined by migration dynamics and rural exodus (Bousnina A. 2015).

As previously noted, exodus (and population displacement) is one of the consequences of uneven regional development. Because of the crisis in the rural world, "the rural exodus (a consequence, among other things, of the process of mechanization) is gradually emptying the countryside of a good part of its workforce [...]. Consequently, the paradox, often observed, between the massive unemployment which rages in the cities and the relative lack of labor in the countryside is only an appearance. Indeed, very often the large and medium-sized mechanized owners only need the majority of their workers for a very small number of days per year; but those who cannot survive for long on this basis leave the countryside for the city with the illusion of finding a more permanent and better paid job there [...]. For the North-West region (for example), it is the quasi-absence of extra-agricultural activities which makes it a repulsive region of the population par excellence" (Dimassi H. and Zaiem M.H, 1982, pp.28-30).

To this end, the rural exodus is sometimes linked not only to socio-economic inequality and unequal regional development, but also to the cultural gap which has

the effect, in the countryside, of delaying economic progress, thus reinforcing immigration trends. It is, in fact, "the opposition between town and country, which leads to the technical opposition of the spatial conditions of economic activity, and which evokes the relationship between two societies or two civilizations (this is the opposition between the two environments that George Friedman calls the natural environment and the technical environment) [...]. The cause of migrations can only be a relationship between rural and urban societies" (Taamallah K., 2001, pp.186-187).

On the other hand, the social effects of unequal development can directly affect the individual and the citizen and they concern - in the words of some officials - "discrimination and inequality of opportunity". Indeed "the regional imbalance has clearly manifested itself in several areas which affect the individual as a social actor and factor of production and which have even reduced his chances of promotion. Inequalities in the face of death, for example due to the weakness of health structures, the absence of leisure [...], to this is added the lack of employment and its precarious nature [...], these phenomena have modulated a behavior hostile to the imbalance, but passive vis-à-vis the implications of development, the fear of initiative, the search for assistance... are phenomena which result from the imbalance of the effects of development" (Sahbani A., 1988, p.417).

In addition to unemployment, exodus, poverty, the lack of social services (which is internalized to the point that it is no longer the object of claims), one of the main social consequences of the persistence of regional inequalities is "the accumulation of conditions of fragmentation and distortion at the expense of feelings of solidarity and national unity. Representations of a passive region (a region at risk) have developed through this regional imbalance; the young executive, for example, avoids working in these regions, the entrepreneur refuses to invest for lack of guarantees..." (Ibid, p.423).

Table 14: The social repercussions of uneven regional development

Answer	Number			
	AC	AR	Total	%
Unemployment	7	11	18	17,6
Rural exodus and internal migration	7	20	27	26,5
Poverty	5	9	14	13,7
Discrimination and regionalism	2	3	5	4,9
Decline in social progress and increase in social inequalities	2	8	10	9,8
Unsatisfactory health services	2	1	3	2,9
Delinquency and crime	3	3	6	5,9
Imbalance in the distribution of the population (and even depopulation of certain regions)	2	1	3	2,9
Human capital unable to stimulate economic growth	1	1	2	1,96
No response	4	10	14	13,7
Total	35	67	102	100%

Source: Personal inquiry

5. Conclusion

This article has attempted to show the complexity of the problem of regional inequality, particularly in terms of the explanation and determinants of unequal regional development. Indeed, the explanations of regional disparities are very varied and they affect concomitantly the historical, the administrative, the social, the political and the economic.

The political explanations of unequal development are multiple and they concern first of all the absence (or the slowness) of decentralization or "the importance of political centralization". This centralization does not value the contribution of regional managers. Moreover, the unequal regional development is determined by many economic causes linked in particular - according to a large proportion of the officials interviewed - to the absence (or weakness) of private investment and the withdrawal of the State following the adoption of the neoliberal path. As for the social explanations, they are linked - according to many officials interviewed - to regional differences in terms of the level of education of the population and literacy (or schooling) and to the mentality of the population which is below the aspirations. On the other hand, and at the historical level, the colonial structure has contributed to the consolidation of certain cities (in particular the coastal ports) which participate most in the colonial economy, unlike the other interior regions which are now dominated by the eastern facade.

As for the repercussions of unequal regional development, they are multiple. At the political and administrative level, most of the responses (of the officials surveyed) revolve around political and administrative centralization and the dissatisfaction of the population with the services of the system. At the economic level, and in addition to the concentration of wealth and production, the various officials surveyed believe that the regional imbalance has generated increased unemployment and weak activity, especially in the interior and rural regions. At the social level, among the social effects cited by the various officials surveyed, the imbalance in the distribution of the population and even the depopulation of certain interior regions as well as the rural exodus and migration.

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