

University Publishing in Morocco

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Morocco lacks academic and commercial structures that would encourage the emergence of scholarly publishing. This lack contributes to the low visibility and low prestige of Moroccan scholars and institutions, even in their own country. At the same time, the country is experiencing rapid growth in student numbers and expectations of access to information. Rather than trying to establish print-based university presses, leading institutions should support the development of a nationwide research repository. Governance and management of such an initiative should remain within the non-profit sector, with an explicit goal of supporting research, but opportunities for genuinely commercial exploitation of the outputs need to be designed in.

Keywords: Morocco, university press, repository, online

1. Introduction

This paper sets out to review the status of academic publishing in Morocco, focusing in particular on the humanities and social sciences (HSS).¹ It is undertaken in the belief that a healthy ecosystem of academic publishing can make an important contribution to a country's overall system of higher education and research.

The approach taken has been to review existing literature and to record observations made in Morocco in March and May 2013.² The paper traces a number of interventions relevant to HSS research and publishing undertaken over the past five years, and looks at some research-publishing and repository initiatives in which the Moroccan

government and universities are currently engaged. Section 4 reviews some scenarios for the future development of Morocco's academic publishing, and recommends an approach based on the further development of the current repository programmes. The question of what a repository might contribute to the development of academic publishing is then posed, with a sketch of the specific elements that may be required in order to achieve such a transition. In the second half of the paper, I propose a pilot project and sketch some organizational structures, resource requirements, and governance arrangements. A final section outlines proposed steps towards implementation.

2. The current situation

2.1. Existing empirical reports on HSS research

The most substantial reports on HSS research structures and outcomes to which I have had access were those published in 2006 and 2009 by Professor Mohamed Cherkaoui on behalf of the Ministry of Higher Education. Cherkaoui draws attention in those reports to the shortage, in Morocco, of national-level learned societies and the consequent absence, as he sees it, of a peer-review culture, regularly published scholarly journals, or research-oriented colloquia and conferences. This lack, in Cherkaoui's view, encourages the publication of individual pieces of work, in book form, in which little attention has been paid to robust quality assurance. Career structures pay little respect to publication (understandably enough, if 'publication' in practice seldom means more than printing), and, in return, publishing fails to deliver its socially desirable quality filter to the research professions. This may mean that the returns overall to Moroccan society from its HSS research funding are lower than either society or the researchers would wish.

With allowances for differences of perspective and changes in emphasis over the course of time, I take these observations of Cherkaoui's as forming the core of the agenda that a programme of improvement for academic publishing in the country should address.

2.2. Existing empirical reports on the publishing industry

The most thorough report to which I have had access is

a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)/Ministry of Culture analysis of the publishing and bookselling industry of approximately 2007.³ I am aware also of a number of long-term 'bibliometric' studies being carried out by the National Library of the Kingdom of Morocco (BNRM) and the King Abdul-Aziz Al Saoud Foundation, this latter focusing particularly on thesis production in HSS. Among the observations of the UNESCO *Etat des lieux* report pertinent to the topic under discussion are the following:

1. (section 1-2) An academic author is expected to contribute to social and cultural development more widely: he or she is a thinker, an intellectual, as well as a researcher.
2. (section 2-1) Of an annual publication output in the region of 1000 titles (low by the standards of such a populous country), literature and literary criticism (28 per cent), law (16 per cent), history, political science, and religion (seven per cent each) account for two-thirds. Sociology, economics, educational research, art, philosophy, linguistics, geography, and psychology make up almost all of the rest. Certain subjects (religion in particular) are subject to powerful foreign competition.
3. (also section 2-1) Long production lead times are viewed by authors as a disincentive to book publication.
4. (section 3-1) Most Moroccan publishers have their roots, and many still the bulk of their business, in printing or bookselling.
5. (section 3-1) Almost all highly valued HSS journals were forbidden or closed in the 1980s.
6. (section 3-1) 'Grey literature', that is to say the published output of government departments, research institutes, and universities, makes up over 10 per cent of the total industry. Of this, Al Akhawayn University and Université Mohammed V Agdal are responsible for almost half between them.
7. (section 3-2) Self-publication is a larger industry, in output terms, at over 30 per cent of the country's total, than the professional private sector. This in turn comprises mostly companies with fewer than 15 staff, many of their titles in practice subsidized by their authors.

8. (section 3-3) Arabic and French each represent 48 per cent of the published title output of Morocco. Print runs cluster in the range 1000–2500, and unsold stock is a serious industry problem.
9. (section 3-5) Small scale in publishing companies correlates with low levels of professional specialization. Even those companies that elicit external advice on their publishing programme and content (through *comités de lecture* or similar) achieve low levels of transparency over publishing decisions. The characteristic structure of the company is a cluster around a single owner-manager who carries out most of the tasks himself and knows most of the authors personally.
10. (section 5-1) Retail distribution is the weakest link in the publishing chain. This in turn leads not only to self-publishing but to home-based distribution.⁴
11. (section 5-3) Morocco's publishing industry has negligible exports, one-thirtieth of the country's imports of published materials. The most-used promotional tools are book fairs, catalogues, media partnerships, print advertising, and posters.
12. (section 5-4) Subsidies from the Ministry of Culture (50 per cent of print costs) are a significant support for books (45 titles a year) and journals deemed of cultural importance.

2.3. Update and synthesis

The picture presented in Cherkaoui's and other research of the years 2005–2010 is of professional structures failing to keep up with the twin demands of globalization abroad and 'massification' (increasing proportions of a given age cohort entering higher education) at home. As knowledge production in the 21st century becomes ever more specialized, the extremely low levels of professional exchange among HSS researchers leave individuals isolated and invisible to their peers, at home or overseas. By my estimate, there are perhaps 3000 academic staff in humanities departments in Morocco's universities, and a further 1000 in law, economics, and allied social sciences. Their quality-controlled publication output in Morocco is low, and what is produced is non-discoverable as a result of low investment in dissemination.

Why does this matter? The production and transmission of knowledge are the primary mission of pub-

lic higher education institutions. The risks of internal focus are that innovation levels across society and the economy will drop and that the outputs (human, in the form of graduates, and material, in the form of published research) of universities will be irrelevant to society's and especially employers' needs.

For a foreign observer, perhaps one of the most striking absences in Morocco's higher education and publishing landscape is that of discipline-based learned societies, and all that goes with them, in the forms of conferences, journals, specialist research training and, so on. (There are exceptions, such as the Association Nationale des Géographes Marocains (ANAGEM), for geography, but these are rare.⁵) The importance of this form of professional cross-fertilization for a researcher is obvious in the way it provides intellectual challenge and development; what is less obvious is that a national or wider community of peers acts as a nuanced counterweight to the otherwise dominant hierarchical organization of a university, in facilitating innovation. This nuance is increasingly necessary in a world in which the public university itself is far less dominant than it was 10 years ago in the production of knowledge: private universities, other state institutions, and indeed industry are increasingly challenging what was once the research hegemony of public universities.

A publishing industry should deliver quality assurance and discoverability on behalf of the reading public. For writers, academic or not, these industry roles represent both a constraint (high standards) and an incentive (external recognition tends to lead to career advancement). But those constraints and incentives appear largely to be absent in today's Morocco, and it will be the aim of this paper from section 4 onwards to sketch some ways in which they might be introduced.

3. Interventions to date

3.1. Interventions: 2008–2012

The Moroccan government, its foreign partners such as the US and European Union, and cultural institutes associated with individual countries all have undertaken initiatives aimed at addressing the unsatisfactory state of affairs outlined above. There are programmes of academic, undergraduate, and postgraduate exchange, most notably those run on a large scale by

different organs of the French government; the French National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS) has a presence in Rabat in the form of the Centre Jacques Berque (CJB). The CJB not only undertakes and sponsors interesting research itself, but disseminates the fruits of that research in a way that I suggest represents a good model for the future (see below). The French publishing and bookselling industries have undertaken multiple interventions over a long period aimed at supporting professional development for booksellers and to some extent for publishers. The Konrad-Adenauer and Friedrich-Ebert Stiftungen have given consistent support to higher education institutions which has led to the publication of much worthwhile output that might otherwise have remained unnoticed, as has America-Mideast Educational and Training Services (AMIDEAST). Through the Goethe Institut, the German publishing industry, led by the Frankfurt Book Fair, trained over the period 2009–2012 several dozen Maghreb publishers in management, strategy, and the application of new-media technologies to editorial and marketing functions. I should highlight here also the outstanding research and curation effort of the Fondation du Roi Abdul-Aziz Al Saoud pour les Etudes Islamiques et les Sciences Humaines, in some ways the best research library in the country.

Although the Moroccan government was active in commissioning, for instance, the Cherkaoui report referenced at the beginning of this paper, it has found its ability to implement far-reaching change in higher education limited by budgetary and other constraints, and by the need to focus on basic literacy outcomes in compulsory schools. The proportion of GDP allocated to research and development in Morocco, at 0.7 per cent, is markedly lower even than Tunisia's (1.1 per cent), never mind the two per cent or so in China and the 'developed world'.⁶ These factors may leave the country worryingly short of skilled and internationally mobile research staff by 2015, since many of those who began their research career overseas are due to retire during the period 2013–2015.

3.2. Current initiatives

Three Moroccan universities are participants, with institutions based in Belgium, France, the Netherlands, Romania, Tunisia, and Algeria, in a European

Commission Tempus-funded project, due to run until early 2014, called IStEMag (<http://istemag.org/>). I quote at length the project aims:

Optimisation de l'Accès à l'Information Scientifique et Technique dans les Universités du Maghreb

L'objectif général du projet vise à l'optimisation de l'accès à l'information scientifique et technique dans les universités du Maghreb en arrivant à:

Établir un bilan détaillé des conditions d'accès à l'IST pour les enseignants- chercheurs et les étudiants des universités maghrébines partenaires.

Créer des portails documentaires des bibliothèques universitaires.

Créer des consortiums documentaires afin d'appuyer la négociation collective de l'accès en ligne aux principales sources d'information.

Définir et mettre en place une politique institutionnelle d'archives ouvertes.

If the IStEMag project does not address—or does not do so explicitly—issues of quality or economic sustainability, it at least takes seriously the issues of discoverability and visibility, which are shortcomings common to both the research community and the publishing/bookselling industry in Morocco. From the perspective of early 2013, IStEMag seems the most promising of the recent interventions around which to build a comprehensive system of research communication and consumption.

A further recent development is the provision by the Institut Marocain de l'Information Scientifique et Technique (IMIST; the information arm of the National Centre for Scientific and Technical Research (CNRST)) in its Portail des Revues Scientifiques Marocaines (<http://revues.imist.ma>) of a number of online journals, including an abstracting journal, the *Bulletin de l'IMIST*, and a geography journal, *Géographie et développement au Maroc*. Few of the IMIST journals have international standard serial numbers (ISSNs), and the level of peer-review quality assurance is unclear to me, but clearly there is some dynamism in disseminating research information, and it is beginning to be extended to the social sciences.

In the private education sector, one sees the highly polished *Economia* (economia.ma) at the centre of an ecosystem that includes commercial and academic conferences, book publications, and employment/recruitment services. At present, *Economia* is heavily subsidized by its parent institution, the Centre d'Etudes Sociales, Economiques et Managériales/Institut des Hautes Etudes de Management (CESEM/HEM), so its interest resides perhaps more in the fact that HEM sees the financial support as worthwhile than in any suggestion that such an undertaking would be self-financing in narrow terms. And occupying the crossover space in which research appeals to the educated lay reader is the commercial print history magazine *Zamane*, selling some 10 000 copies per month and planning online activity alongside a repositioned Arabic-language companion magazine.

4. Potential paths of future development

One can readily imagine a number of scenarios for the development of academic publishing in Morocco. If no concerted intervention is undertaken, there is no reasonable prospect of improvement in the current unsatisfactory state of affairs. The publishing industry is built around talented and committed individuals, but it is on a very small scale, little of it is profitable, and its focus tends to be on children's books, school books, religious tracts, and projects conceived for the overt promotion of national political goals and which attract subsidies. Publishers and booksellers alike are risk averse, in an environment in which piracy is an ever-present threat; and the discovery of new talent—central to research publishing and necessarily involving risk-taking—is not a major operational priority for any of them.

One could try to establish a major new academic publishing house, relying, like HSS publishers in much of the world, largely on print sales of books. But it is no accident that such a creature has failed to emerge in today's Morocco. The fragmented language landscape⁷ imposes costs that are significant in a print environment; and the physical distribution of printed materials across North Africa is beset with organizational and political difficulty, so that even where larger scale should be achievable, through exports to other Maghreb countries or further afield, this prospect turns out to be illusory. A large new print publisher would

therefore need heavy investment and a long-term commitment to heavy subsidy (presumably from the state) and, even if such subsidy were offered, it would distort competition and economic incentives. I cannot see this as either desirable or realistic.

In many ways, a purely electronic solution would be the most elegant. And if we were dealing solely with the biomedical or certain other natural sciences, where communication tends to be urgent and global, and the research endeavour is highly team based, a 'web' solution might also be relevant to the needs of the community. But I do not see that as the situation of HSS research communication in Morocco: readers and writers see books as central to their concerns. My own view is that this perspective is likely to change in the coming years, to greater reliance on electronic communication, involving video and sound alongside the written word, and with short lead times. So one should seek, perhaps, to incorporate an element of flexibility in what is built, so that such a future, or a thinkable evolution in that direction, can be supported; but to impose a Silicon Valley vision today would run the risk of building for a demand that is as yet far from proven.

It seems to me therefore wisest to advocate the construction of an electronic backbone that can support the delivery of what is known to be needed, as well as what is considered likely.

It seems to me therefore wisest to advocate the construction of an electronic backbone that can support the delivery of what is known to be needed, as well as what is considered likely. Among the needs to be met are that of the national higher education system for validation and quality assurance of its outputs, and that of the international research community and the public at large for efficient delivery mechanisms. Processes and products must be able to change as needs change, and all participants will seek to limit financial and other risks (in the form, chiefly, of speculative investments). This will require intelligent use of those assets

that already exist. Finally, I suggest, there is a role for the commercial sector as a route to economic sustainability.

The proposal that follows is based on the further development of what seem to me the most important assets that are in the process of creation in Morocco—the university-based repositories and IMIST’s online services—to see how these could contribute to meeting the needs of the country’s HSS researchers and their potential readers, at home and internationally.

5. What will a repository and open archive accomplish?

The principal aim of an open-access repository is to improve access, for specialists, teachers, students, and the public at large, to research outputs. If this sounds obvious, it is not. The functions of showcasing national research, asserting primacy in invention, career advancement, or any other supply-side benefits are subordinate to the user-side enhancements that are sought.

The improvements in impact that should arise for the individual researcher and their institution are huge. One commercial publisher in the UK that makes available free downloads of social-science books as well as selling print copies reported 50 000 downloads of a recent popular title, and 5000 print copies sold. The extra publicity generated by the open availability more than offsets the sales-substitution effect. A 2013 University of Cambridge conference proceedings volume on experiences of conversion to Islam in Britain generated 11 000 downloads in its first week. If the same work had been for sale in paper form, it is hard to imagine it would have sold 1000.

6. What else needs to be put in place?

Improving discovery and levels of use will be a major achievement. Most potential readers, in Morocco and elsewhere, have adequate internet access. But quantity of access needs to be delivered in concert with measures of quality. Increasingly there are automated systems for enhancing the visibility of proxy quality measures such as citations indices. It would be unwise, however, to rely exclusively on these. In a number of disciplines—literary and religious studies, political science, and others—and even within a community of scholarly practice, popularity is an unreliable guide to

research calibre! So originators of material—authors and their employing institutions—must establish and apply robust systems of quality assurance.

An initiative that makes securely available quality-assured publications, at higher levels of scale, will deliver public benefits in the form of higher levels of intellectual innovation, transparent decision-making processes at multiple stages of the research enterprise (funding priorities and outcomes, promotions), and of course direct access to the information. It seems to me desirable that the access thus delivered to research outputs be consolidated. As numerous commentators over the last decade have remarked, there is a risk in Morocco of fragmentation of knowledge. Repositories address this risk only incompletely. A single repository, or at least a dedicated search-and-discovery layer on top of repositories, reduces the search load on the information user. *OpenDOAR* (www.opendoar.org) would be more likely to list a national repository, I suggest, than 15 or so separate ones.

In order to achieve the social objectives outlined, the governance of new institutional arrangements for delivery must be multi-disciplinary and multi-dimensional, incorporating academic, technical, financial, and political leaders, and aim to limit ‘unintended consequences’⁸. And in the long run, I suggest, sustainability will be enhanced by a designed role for the private commercial sector.

7. Proposal: pilot participants

A project that builds on existing initiatives is likelier to be capable of fast implementation, and close to perceived needs, than one invented anew. The ITeMag and IMIST initiatives, locally owned and governed, provide opportunities for development that could deliver results for HSS researchers and their readers within a reasonable time-frame, at reasonable cost. I see the universities as the only potential short-term locus of editorial control and quality assurance in the form of peer review. They have individuals and in some cases even existing committees for the purpose of review of dissertations and theses and could, I believe, in a short time institutionalize levels of assurance that are currently lacking for most of Morocco’s academic print output (I emphasize that this is my view for the short term; in the longer term, it is likely that a better locus of

control would be learned societies, but these scarcely exist in today's Morocco. I like to consider ANAGEM a 'horizontal' structure capable of specialist curation, in its own field analogous to a university).

Universities are beyond their core mission when it comes to dissemination of specialist content nationally and internationally. For that, I suggest a single point of contact is essential, and that point of contact might be IMIST. Technically and in terms of its statutory mission, IMIST has the critical assets that would be required to run content storage, discovery, and open-access dissemination, which is the mode I suggest is most suitable for the majority of research outputs.

Some research outputs have the potential for genuine commercial exploitation. This might be in the form of paid access for institutional subscriptions at foreign universities and research institutions; it might be paid downloads of electronic books or large volumes of article-length material; and it almost certainly would extend to print-on-demand editions of books, such as those already being produced by the CJB to high standards of editorial curation and physical manufacture. Although a number of private-sector organizations might be interested in working to deliver some or all of these commercial benefits, it seems to me the company with the most credible track record in associated activities is LivreMoi.ma, operating principally in French but with the capability to service English-language needs as well (Amazon appears to service Morocco from France and Spain). For Arabic-language material an additional partnership may be needed, e.g., with Neelwafurat.com.

Zamane has shown there is also a mass market for research outputs in history, published in French (and more recently in Arabic). This suggests there are markets also among the educated Arabic-reading public, and in subjects ranging from sociology and political science to religious studies and linguistics. Existing publishers in these disciplines in Morocco acknowledge their difficulty in refreshing their author base to include younger scholars and extending it beyond the circle of the owner-managers' personal acquaintances. An initiative that renders new talent and new knowledge more discoverable to this intermediary audience of consumer publishers would solve one of their most intractable problems.

8. Structures and time-frames

The pilot should include approaches to the digitization and commercialization of a number of existing assets (such as archives and journal back numbers). Funds generated would be used for the advancement of research, such as by supporting the development of learned societies and conferences. Start-up priorities would include the establishment of submission guidelines, standard author contracts, and peer-review processes.

9. Resource requirements and potential partners

To limit financial risks, no investment should be foreseen in print-manufacturing facilities or in speculative stock. Money would be spent on achieving the right technical specifications, training, and advice. To the extent that a publishing programme generates commercially exploitable assets (popular books, magazine articles for the general public), these would be governed by separate contracts between authors and private-sector publishers.

10. Governance and risks

If governance needs to be trustworthy, it must also be flexible! Or, at least, it must not be static. By this apparent paradox is intended that it must be possible for discipline-specific journals to emerge; elements such as prizes and competitions which incentivize excellence may have to come at a later stage; and quality-assurance standards can only realistically be enforced from within the community, with the 'publishers' (the universities and societies) helping each other to set, enforce, and improve standards.

11. Next steps

It should be clear from section 10 that the leadership of any project belongs in Moroccan hands, not with the British Council or any other foreign institution. Leadership should be anchored also in the public sector, however significant might be the help available in due course from commercial actors. It was my recommendation that the Director of CNRST be asked formally to constitute a small working group consisting primarily of university leaders plus the head of IMIST, to define scope, priorities, and roles, set initial budgets, and outline funding needs for any sub-programmes such as university exchanges and training.⁹ There would be an

advisory role within the working group for the Director of the British Council.

An initial priority for this group would be the appointment and induction of an individual as its principal administrator, who would have responsibility for assuring the standards both of content quality control and of the delivery mechanisms (in the short term, the individual would be very busy fundraising and arranging for their own training. Foreign cultural institutes might have a significant support role in this regard).

Equally clear should be what I am not recommending:

- the acquisition of warehouses, transport, or printing capacity;
- a commercial role for public-sector universities (any article processing fee should cover costs only).

The publishing ecosystem I would hope to see emerge from such action would be hybrid:

1. the state, or its organs, responsible for the wide

and inexpensive dissemination of quality-assured knowledge, acting first;

2. the private sector, able for the first time to discover home-grown talent, gradually developing low-risk business streams, firstly with investment in digital delivery of ebooks and print-on-demand products, and potentially funding the transition into an industry producing the most important works on a commercial scale.

Hybridity has advantages in evolutionary terms. Not least of these are the abilities to withstand shocks and to discover niches. The technical environment for publishing is changing in the 21st century faster than it has for perhaps 500 years. The shape of what might emerge from two or three years of concerted effort by state and a few commercial actors, with modest amounts of outside help, is bound to be different from anything we can foresee today. That uncertainty cannot excuse inaction, which would ill serve Morocco's researchers and learners. Two certain needs will not change with technology: (1) for transparent processes, and (2) for readers to find the knowledge they need. ■

References

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Cherkaoui, M., 2009. *Rapport de synthèse* (Rabat: Ministère de l'Enseignement Supérieur, de la Formation des Cadres et de la Recherche Scientifique)

Notes

1 This article is informed by work commissioned by the British Council and is an abbreviated version of a report submitted as part of that work, in Morocco in March to July 2013. I am grateful to the British Council, and in particular to the Director of the British Council in Morocco, Martin Rose, both for the original commission and for permission to publish this derivative of the original report.

2 I was able to visit the universities of most interest to me in Rabat, Casablanca, and Marrakech, as well as a number of private institutions. I had earlier spoken to senior researchers and academic leaders from most of the other government universities. I regret that timetabling difficulties caused the important omission of Agadir from this list, so this report does not yet reflect systematic discussion there.

- 3 *Etat des lieux du secteur des livres au Maroc*; no bibliographic data supplied. This came to me as a file called 'unesco_clt_05_fr'. If any reader can identify or introduce me to its principal author, I should be grateful.
- 4 One informant to the UNESCO study explains, 'Le manque d'expérience de l'auteur qui se charge de distribuer son livre lui-même constitue un handicap majeur. Il peut, par naïveté ou manque de moyens, déposer son livre chez quelques libraires. Les lecteurs qui en ont entendu parler le demandent à leur propre libraire qui ne peut [sic], généralement, satisfaire leur demande car il n'a pas reçu le livre ... Bien sûr, il est nécessaire que le livre bénéficie d'une bonne promotion. Souvent, cette dernière est mal gérée; l'auteur annonce la sortie du livre dans les journaux *avant* la mise en vente de l'ouvrage. Quand le livre arrive en librairie, le lecteur concerné est déjà passé. *En vain.*'
- 5 The contribution of this society to its members' professional development is substantial. Its journal, the *Revue de Géographie du Maroc*, enhances the visibility of work of doctoral students and early-career researchers as well as providing a disciplined forum for the evaluation of commercially commissioned work, international projects, and CNRST-supported joint activity.
- 6 Source: <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/GB.XPD.RSDV.GD.ZS>
- 7 If most people speak a Berber language or Moroccan Arabic (Darija) at home, only a small proportion read their first language well. Newspapers have a circulation of maybe one per cent of the population. There are not many fluent readers of French and fewer still of English.
- 8 Public subsidies for large numbers of publications can produce unintended outcomes and perverse incentives. Forty-five books a year with subsidized manufacturing costs are enough to distort market price expectations for non-subsidized books. A researcher who receives a subsidy for manufacturing their book regardless of how well it is distributed has little reason to promote the book by appearing in public or expert discussions of the book topic, or indeed to submit the text to exhaustive critical review ahead of manufacture. And so on.
- 9 The Université Mohammed V Agdal (UM5A) kindly hosted a meeting in Rabat at the beginning of the 2013–2014 academic year to discuss the recommendations and next steps identified in this report. A steering group was formed, representing the leading public universities, chaired by Professor Omar Halli, President of Université Ibn Zohr, Agadir, and with support from Professor Abderahim Benhadda of UM5A. I understand that IMIST has continued to offer its hosting services for a number of pilot projects, but none has yet been implemented.