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Innovation Policy for Promoting Inclusive Growth and Competitiveness in the EU and in Asian Countries

Abstract

When taking actions to promote the competitiveness of a given country or group, the benefits of higher growth and dynamic development should be reaped by all members of a given community or group and, thus, this growth should be inclusive. The aim of the paper is to present the role of the innovation policy in fostering inclusive growth in China and in the EU. It is arguable that this policy should, in particular, support the growth of inclusive innovation irrespective of the level or value of the economic growth of a given country. However, given the diverse conditions of each country and, thus, different issues to be tackled, inclusive innovation must consider how unique such countries are. Supporting and developing inclusive innovation is not only the exclusive policy of developing countries such as China. In the EU, fostering this kind of innovation is highly encouraged, which contributes to achieving sustainable growth and ensuring benefits from inclusive innovations to EU inhabitants given that this is the major priority of this union and the foundation on which further continued growth of the EU is built.

Key words: Inclusive Innovation, Inclusive Growth, Innovation Policy

Introduction

When taking actions to promote the competitiveness of a given country or group, the benefits of higher growth and dynamic development should be reaped by all members of a given community or group and,

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thus, this growth should be inclusive. Given the changing external conditions, including the economic and financial crisis, it is necessary to provide even more support for socially less advantaged groups. The Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union underlines the necessity to ensure the well-being of all its inhabitants and indicates that the objective is “to ensure the economic and social progress of their States by common action to eliminate the barriers which divide Europe” and “affirming as the essential objective of their efforts the constant improvements of the living and working conditions of their peoples”.¹ In EU documents – mainly in the Europe 2020 strategy – one of the priorities is not only smart and sustainable but also inclusive growth, which means that a high-employment economy will be fostered with a view to achieving economic, social, and territorial cohesion. The growth of this type also includes investing in skills, fighting poverty, and taking actions to modernise labour markets or social protection.² There is no doubt that the spectrum of planned and implemented actions in this respect is broad both at the level of the EU and individual Member States. In particular, this spectrum is fostered considerably in terms of innovation policy by implementing inclusive innovation.

The issue of inclusive growth is also discussed in various regions of the world, including Asian countries. Compared to other parts of the world, the economic growth of China is still relatively high, which is accompanied by problems of a different nature, including social ones. Even though China has no official policy concerning inclusive innovation, the government’s policies, including the economic policy, have supported inclusive innovation; furthermore, the well-being of the Chinese has been improved by scientific and technical innovations since 2002.³ By seeking directions and tools for achieving even more sustainable and inclusive growth and, thus, providing inclusiveness for marginal people and groups, it was decided that a policy supporting innovative solutions should be considered.

The aim of the paper is to present the role of the innovation policy in fostering inclusive growth in China and in the EU. It is arguable that

¹ *Preamble, Consolidated version of the Treaty on the functioning of the European Union*, Official Journal of the European Union, 2016/C 202/47.

² *Europe 2020, Strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth*, Communication from the Commission, Brussels, 3.3.2010, COM(2010) 2020 final, pp. 5, 11–12, 20–22.

³ *Overview of inclusive innovation policies in the People’s Republic of China*, Chinese Academy of Science and Technology for Development, Beijing, December 2016, https://www.innovationpolicyplatform.org/system/files/imce/InclusiveInnovation-PoliciesChina_FINAL.pdf (17.05.2018).

this policy should, in particular, support the growth of inclusive innovation irrespective of the level or value of the economic growth of a given country. However, given the diverse conditions of each country and, thus, different issues to be tackled, inclusive innovation must consider how unique each country is.

Some Considerations on Inclusive Innovation

The lines for action taken in each country and group are aimed at fostering economic growth, which, in turn, ought to contribute to improving the well-being of the society of such countries and integration groups. Still, it is not always the case that benefits of increased material well-being are disseminated evenly within different social groups; as a result, growth is not inclusive. Further, the issue of inclusiveness is itself multi-dimensional since it refers not only to poverty and income distribution between people or households but also to well-being or participation in the social life of individuals.⁴ Therefore, it may be indicated that inclusive growth is the one “that is both sustainable and broad-based in terms of employment opportunities”⁵ or, in broader terms, the one that brings benefits to numerous people and social groups. As a result, actions are implemented, including innovative ones, which aim to contribute to achieving the aforementioned objective.

Innovations are launched to accomplish numerous diverse objectives, which include both improving the competitiveness of a country or company and supporting social inclusiveness. With that in mind, inclusive innovation, i.e. “initiatives that directly serve the welfare of lower-income and excluded groups”⁶ is considered and present in different areas and spheres of life. Inclusive innovation may also be described as “the means by which goods and services are developed for and by marginal groups (the poor, women, the disabled, ethnic minorities, etc.)”⁷ or as “any innovation that helps expand affordable access to quality products and services which help create livelihood opportunities for excluded populations

⁴ *Promoting inclusive growth. Challenges and policies*, eds. L. de Mello, M.A. Dutz, OECD, the World Bank, OECD Publishing 2012, pp. 9–10, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264168305-en> (17.05.2018).

⁵ M.H. Khan, *The political economy of inclusive growth*, in: *Promoting inclusive growth...*, op. cit., p. 16.

⁶ *Innovation policies for inclusive growth*, OECD, OECD Publishing 2015, p. 5, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264229488-en> (17.05.2018).

⁷ Ch. Foster, R. Heeks, *Policies to support inclusive innovation*, “Manchester Centre for Development Informatics Working Paper”, no. 61/2015, p. 2.

– on a sustainable basis and with significant outreach”.⁸ Innovations of this type also refer to new ideas that will improve the economic well-being of groups of marginal, vulnerable people or those on low incomes.⁹

Still, the following innovation aspects should be considered: the necessity of scaling innovations, i.e. initiatives undertaken in this respect, require broad propagation and focus on creating financially sustainable business models. It is important for marginal people and those with low incomes to participate in such initiatives and, thus, to focus on their integration and inclusiveness;¹⁰ on the other hand, there is another aspect that describes inclusive innovation: the issue of which members of marginal groups should be included in innovations. As for inclusive innovation, the question is on which marginal/marginalised groups such innovations should focus, given that they include different categories/groups of people. The idea is that they should focus on the poor with the lowest incomes, and the innovation that provides inclusiveness for marginal groups should be prioritized.¹¹

Therefore, a comprehensive approach to inclusive innovation should be taken into consideration. This approach presents innovations in the form of the so-called ladder of inclusive innovation, each level of which allows you to have a deeper understanding of this type of innovation and, thus, inclusiveness. At the same time, it is the next step that involves deepening and/or widening the range of inclusiveness of such marginal groups. Level 1 concerns intention, as innovations are to address the needs or problems of marginal groups. The next level concerns consumption in the sense that inclusive innovation is adopted and used by marginal groups; therefore, concrete goods or services have to be developed. The third level tackles the impact of innovation on the livelihoods of marginal groups; this impact has various definitions, e.g. in the context of improving productivity, well-being, usefulness; livelihoods in the qualitative context; and opportunities in the quantitative one. The next level, process, is when the marginal group is involved in the development of the innovation, while the fifth level is characterised by an inclusive structure,

⁸ *China: Inclusive innovation for sustainable inclusive growth*, Document of the World Bank, October 2013, p. iii, http://www.worldbank.org/content/dam/Worldbank/document/EAP/China/china-inclusive-innovation-policy-report_en.pdf (17.05.2018).

⁹ *Overview of inclusive innovation policies...*, op. cit., p. 3, https://www.innovation-policyplatform.org/system/files/imce/InclusiveInnovationPoliciesChina_FINAL.pdf (7.07.2016).

¹⁰ *Innovation policies for inclusive growth...*, op. cit., pp. 5, 10.

¹¹ R. Heeks, M. Amalia, R. Kintu, N. Shah, *Inclusive innovation: definition, conceptualisation and future research priorities*, “Manchester Centre for Development Informatics Working Paper”, no. 53/2013, pp. 4–6.

Table 1. Inclusive and standard innovations

Types of innovation and their impact	Costs of providing innovations
<p>Standard innovations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • opportunities provided for radical and incremental types of innovation; demand and supply conditions allow exploring a variety of demands; • demand for individual firm characterised by volatility depending on various trends, less prone to exogenous shocks; • higher incomes provide opportunities for consumption of products with longer-term benefits and corresponding investments; • consumers are often better informed about product benefits and uses. 	<p>Larger opportunities for innovation development compared to inclusive innovators, as public goods provide adequate market infrastructure.</p>
<p>Inclusive innovation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demand requires innovations that substitute for absent public services; • demand for innovations is characterised by uncertainty: new products often create new markets, whose prospects are hard to evaluate; • grassroots innovations need to emphasise economic activities relevant to the poor; • inclusive innovation provides returns to consumers; for grassroots innovations, additional contributions stem from integrating the poor into economic activities; • the constrained budgets of the poor entail a low willingness and ability to pay for products and services without immediate tangible benefits. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lack of baseline conditions; • lack of infrastructure raises costs of supplying the lowest-income market with products, “difficult-to-reach” markets increase prices charged for products.
Differential policy approaches for inclusive innovation	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensure regulatory impediments do not prohibit or constrain innovations serving the poor; • facilitate access to training and capital; • developing credit options; • credit options to smooth consumption patterns and, as a result, providing firms with more stable income; • training/providing consumer information is critical to the uptake of relevant products. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • product provision should be devised in a way that either does not require basic infrastructure or simultaneously supplies infrastructure. • continued efforts to provide basic infrastructure can raise opportunities for inclusive innovations.

Source: *Innovation policies for inclusive growth...*, op. cit., pp. 19–20 and the author’s modification.

on the basis of which inclusive innovations are developed and created as part of an innovation system. The sixth and last level, post-structure, refers to the fact that inclusive innovation is created within a frame of knowledge and discourse that is itself inclusive.¹² Table 1 presents differences between inclusive and standard innovations.

It is without doubt that innovations affect inclusive growth experienced by people with low and middle incomes through a direct impact on income distribution, frugal innovation, the aim of which is to find solutions that enhance incomes of various groups. In general, such innovations involve changed versions of products already in use so that such products are available for people with low incomes or innovations concerning the business process. Example of inclusive innovations include healthcare service providers in India using ICT to reduce treatment costs, while new healthcare centres are being built in remote areas for rural communities, and the Tata Nano, which is the cheapest car. Another type of innovation includes grassroots innovations undertaken and developed by people with low and low-middle incomes by gaining traditional and externally-developed sources of knowledge; still, it is a local dimension of such innovations that is important. Grassroots innovations are undertaken by the poor and associated with the informal economy; yet, they can be supported by other actors in the innovation system such as universities, private firms, or non-governmental organisations. At the same time, the role of the poor in these innovations may vary: from a minor role e.g. as product distributors to a more extensive one, for example sanitary napkin-making machines in India. This concerns the adoption of innovative/revealing solutions using the existing technologies.¹³

Role of Innovation Policy in Supporting Inclusive Growth

The aim of implementing inclusive innovation policies is to solve the misallocation of resources in the economy, to create jobs and promote economic growth/development.¹⁴ The question is: what the weaknesses of the innovation system that does not support inclusive innovation are? They include development failures, i.e. such innovations are not being

¹² *Ibidem*, pp. 4–7.

¹³ C. Paunov, *Innovation and inclusive development: a discussion of the main policy issues*, “Working Paper Series DSTI/DOC”, no. 1/2013, pp. 6, 9–11; *Innovation policies for inclusive growth...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 10–12.

¹⁴ S. Planes-Satorra, C. Paunov, *Inclusive innovation policies. Lessons from international case studies*, “OECD Science, Technology and Industry Working Papers”, no. 2/2017, p. 27, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/a09a3a5d-en> (18.05.2018).

developed enough; design failures and, thus, failures in the existing mismatch between needs and the context of marginalised groups. Another weakness is a diffusion failure, i.e. it is because innovations do not disseminate: do not scale, do not increase; or there are issues with their dissemination and failures when it comes to their use, which result from the fact that these innovations are not used effectively enough for their impact to be sufficient, the example being when they are used in a limited scope.¹⁵

Inclusive innovation policies are therefore indicated and considered as such policies that “aim to remove barriers to the participation of individuals, social groups, firms, sectors and regions that are underrepresented in innovation activities. Their objective is to provide all segments of society with equal opportunities to successfully participate in and benefit from innovation”.¹⁶ However, these policies address the challenges associated with social, industrial, and territorial inclusiveness using available instruments. What is more, they contribute to achieving social inclusiveness, i.e. including individuals and groups in activities in terms of research, entrepreneurship, and innovation activities. Industrial inclusiveness, on the other hand, concerns actions in favour of implementing innovation activities in less innovative companies, whereas territorial inclusiveness focuses on less innovative regions in order to reduce differences between less and more innovative regions. The instruments used by the policy are aimed to include disadvantaged groups in innovation activities, to meet challenges associated with barriers to entrepreneurship, and to enhance innovation in disadvantaged areas.¹⁷

The necessity to provide inclusive growth is an essential issue to be tackled not only in countries with strong economic growth and, at the same time, with a lower development level such as China, but also in highly-developed EU countries, in which there are various problems and it is necessary to support inclusive growth.

Innovation Policy for Inclusive Growth in the EU

The Europe 2020 strategy for the EU emphasises the need to support inclusive growth, which became one of the development priorities. What is more, it stresses that the number of marginal people has to be reduced by at least 20 million.¹⁸ Still, the progress in this regard is measured us-

¹⁵ Ch. Foster, R. Heeks, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

¹⁶ S. Planes-Satorra, C. Paunov, *op. cit.*, pp. 17–27.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 17.

¹⁸ *Europe 2020, Strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth...*, *op. cit.*

ing the following indicators: people at risk of poverty or social exclusion – being a headline indicator and described further by sub-indicators, and three dimensions of poverty are considered, which include monetary poverty. Other sub-indicators include severe material deprivation and very low work household intensity, which describe social exclusion. However, an individual does not have to experience all three dimensions of poverty. In 2016, 23.8% of the EU population was threatened by poverty or social exclusion,¹⁹ while the following groups of people were particularly threatened by poverty or social exclusion in the EU: women, children, also young or unemployed people, lone parents, people with a lower level of education, those born in a different country, or those living in rural areas²⁰ (Table 2).

Table 2. Indicators characterised in the EU and related to the priority of the Europe 2020 strategy – inclusive growth

Headline Indicator – people at risk of poverty or social exclusion	Unit	2010	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
People at risk of poverty or social exclusion ⁽¹⁾	Cumulative difference from 2008 in thousand	516	5,458	4,635	1,819	810	(:)
	% of total population	23.8	24.6	24.4	23.8	23.5	(:)
People living in households with very low work intensity	Thousand	38,978	41,147	42,134	39,830	39,135	(:)
	% of total population	10.3	11.0	11.3	10.7	10.5	(:)
People at risk of poverty after social transfers	Thousand	82,020	83,419	85,969	86,752	86,904	(:)
	% of total population	16.5	16.7	17.2	17.3	17.3	(:)
People severely materially deprived	Thousand	41,682	48,076	44,465	40,361	37,800	33,384 ^(e)
	% of total population	8.4	9.6	8.9	8.1	7.5	6.7 ^(e)

Source: Headline indicators scoreboard, <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/europe-2020-indicators/europe-2020-strategy/headline-indicators-scoreboard> and related websites (31.07.2018).

¹⁹ *Smarter, greener, more inclusive? Indicators to support the Europe 2020 strategy*, 2017 edition, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg 2017, p. 130.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 143–151.

The EU implements actions related to promoting societal challenges, including inclusiveness, through research programmes as part of the activities supported by European funds. The Horizon 2020 programme includes diverse areas such as: Societal Challenges, on which USD 35.4 billion PPP (EUR 29.7 billion) was allocated and distributed along 7 challenges: health, demographic change and well-being; food security, sustainable agriculture and forestry, marine, maritime and inland water research and the bioeconomy; smart, green and integrated transport systems; climate action, the environment, and resource efficiency and raw materials; inclusive, innovative and reflective societies; secure societies.²¹ Financial resources are also launched under other programmes, including those supported from the European Social Fund. The EU Programme for Employment and Social Innovation is being implemented as a financial instrument that supports sustainable employment and counteracts social exclusion and poverty. It includes the instruments that were in use from 2007–2013: Progress, EURES, and Progress Microfinance. The last instrument – the Microfinance and Social Entrepreneurship axis – provides support for microcredits, micro-loans, and social entrepreneurship.²²

Individual EU Member States also take appropriate measures in favour of social innovations. For example, there is an initiative concerning start-ups and business transfer in the State of Baden–Württemberg (since 2012) in order to support immigrant entrepreneurship. The implemented instrument included – public awareness campaigns, financial support for training and counselling initiatives for immigrant entrepreneurs provided by business chambers.²³ In 2007–2013, there was a programme in Lithuania (the European Progress Microfinance Facility Programme) that fostered women’s entrepreneurship by facilitating their access to financial services. Micro-loans with favourable conditions on credit provision and repayment were granted.²⁴ In Ireland, on the other hand, there was an innovation vouchers programme for the design sector when it was discovered that start-ups in the design sector experienced issues due to the lack of resources. Therefore, as part of the programme, young SMEs in this sector were granted funds so that they could achieve their technical and trade milestones and introduce new products onto the international market. The instrument involved equity investment and technical

²¹ <https://www.innovationpolicyplatform.org/content/european-union> (1.08.2018).

²² *Guide to EU funding 2014–2020*, European Parliamentary Research Service, European Union 2017, pp. 37–39, http://www.europarl.europa.eu/EPRS/Funding_Guide.pdf.

²³ S. Planes-Satorra, C. Paunov, op. cit., p. 50.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 51.

support for firms.²⁵ Including several countries, the EuroAgri Foodchain project provides support for R&D in the agricultural and food sector from 2014–2020 and involves SMEs, large companies, universities, and research establishments. The project features the participation of companies from 12 countries in order to support international R&D cooperation in terms of the agri-food industry. Established in 1985, it is being developed as part of the EUREKA network that includes over 40 countries; EuroAgri FoodChain is one of the EUREKA network platforms and aims at supporting productivity and competitiveness of the agri-food industry in Europe through aiding R&D-related projects in this industry. This support revolves around introducing potential partners, financing, promoting products and technologies developed within the frame of the project, counselling, and accessing EuroAgri foodChain information.²⁶

Promoting Inclusive Innovation in Asian Countries Through the Innovation Policy – The China Example

Supporting inclusive growth is also becoming an important objective in China due to the scale of the problems experienced there. In 2017, the Gini index was 42.2 (2012 World Bank estimate); income share held by the highest 10% – 31.4%; by the highest 20% – 47.9%; by the lowest 10% – 2.1%; and the lowest 20% – 5.2%, which is also associated with strong economic growth in this Asian country.²⁷ Still, China has no policy concerning inclusive innovation promotion; instead, numerous initiatives, including policies, aimed at doing so have been implemented since 1978. At first, the Chinese government focused on the development of the infrastructure and the creation of a new one; then efficiency became the top priority. As a result, strong economic growth was recorded in China. However, the notion that scientific and technological innovations are a crucial strategy for improving the well-being of the Chinese has been fostered since 2002. It is inclusive innovation that is important, nonetheless. There is an ongoing implementation of policies that promote inclusive innovations for public well-being, agricultural and rural development, regional development, industrial development, small- and micro-enterprises, and grassroots innovation. The public well-being area should be considered

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 54.

²⁶ *Innovation policies for inclusiveness – policy cases. EuroAgri Foodchain. Country: Participating EUREKA countries*, January 2017, https://www.innovationpolicyplatform.org/sites/default/files/EUREKAcountries_EuroagriFoodchain_0.pdf (1.07.2018).

²⁷ *World Development Indicators – Poverty and Shared Prosperity*: <http://wdi.worldbank.org/tables> (1.07.2018).

because the 12th Five-Year Plan on National Economic and Social Development (2011–2015) provides details on various types of support provided for people's livelihoods. As for grassroots innovation, on the other hand, policies are aimed to support S&T education in rural areas through programmes being launched, providing S&T services, financing loans, and providing technological counselling.²⁸ The National Programme for Medium and Long-Term Scientific and Technological Development (2006–2020) identified agriculture, environment, health and livelihoods as priority themes. The 12th Five-Year Plan for the Development of Science and Technology of China states that the country must use science and technology to benefit people's welfare, connect scientific and technological progress and innovation with improving people's living standards and quality of life; and strengthen the application of advanced scientific and technological achievements to promote the popularisation of science and technology.²⁹

An example of a policy implemented as part of inclusive innovation constitutes the Innovation Fund for SMEs, which has been developed since 1999 and focuses on enhancing the capability of SMEs to engage in S&T innovation, as well as on encouraging various entities to increase investment in technology innovation by SMEs. The objective of this policy's instruments is to support territorial and industrial inclusiveness. The Fund features the following instruments: financial support for S&T SMEs in the early stage and advisory support.³⁰

Despite all the actions and activities undertaken through inclusive innovation practices, China still faces various problems: a high share of people with low incomes, unsustainable regional development, or inequality in access to basic public services. Further lines for action include the necessity of considering the significance of making this policy more inclusiveness-oriented, supporting grassroots group innovators and companies in developing inclusive innovations, identifying the demand for inclusive innovations in individual regions and social groups, making improvements to the policy system so that it could reflect the low-income people's demand. Therefore, the fact that inclusive innovation should not be associated with low costs and prices is also to be considered, with the need to retain the protection of intellectual property rights.³¹

²⁸ *Overview of inclusive innovation policies...*, op. cit., pp. 3–4, 7.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 7–8.

³⁰ *Innovation Fund for SMEs. Innovation Policies for Inclusiveness - policy cases, Country: People's Republic of China*, https://www.innovationpolicyplatform.org/sites/default/files/China_InnovationFundforSMEs_0.pdf (1.07.2018).

³¹ *Overview of inclusive innovation policies...*, op. cit., pp. 32–33.

Conclusion

To conclude, the social dimension of economic growth is becoming increasingly important these days. To support inclusiveness in various dimensions, innovative solutions are being implemented as part of the innovation policy. The positive impact of inclusive innovation is reflected in its scaling, and this scaling depends on where consumers are located and what market segmentation is like. Therefore, appropriate demand is significant. As indicated by the experience gained from the implementation of the innovations that have been successful in scaling (including mobile phones and other mobile services), this scale was possible as a result of strong demand, gaining a deep understanding of the requirements of the poor, developing profitable business models, favourable regulatory conditions, private entrepreneurial initiative, open access to the ICT infrastructure, building on existing infrastructures.³² Supporting and developing inclusive innovation is not only the exclusive policy of developing countries such as China. In the EU, fostering this kind of innovation is highly encouraged, which contributes to achieving sustainable growth and ensuring benefits from inclusive innovations to EU inhabitants, given that this is a major priority of this union and the foundation on which further continued growth of the EU is built.

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³² *Innovation policies for inclusive growth...*, op. cit., pp. 24–28.

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