



REGIONE AUTONOMA DE SARDIGNA
REGIONE AUTONOMA DELLA SARDEGNA



VOICES OF THE MEDITERRANEAN



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Joumana Sweiss and
Martin Heibel
ENI CBC Med
Programme

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VOICES OF THE MEDITERRANEAN

STORIES OF PEOPLE
SHAPING A BETTER
MEDITERRANEAN



REGIONE AUTÓNOMA DE SARDIGNA
REGIONE AUTONOMA DELLA SARDEGNA

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INTRODUCTION

EU-funded programmes are often perceived through the lens of financial figures, graphs and statistics, action plans and strategies. But what is the impact of these programmes on citizens? What are their realities and how a grant or some support from the European Union can contribute to changing people's lives and, to a certain extent their communities in the Mediterranean area?

The Mediterranean region is a complex one. It faces significant issues in crucial sectors such as water, energy and food production and needs to quickly adapt to the consequences of climate change. Coastal areas are highly urbanised and suffer the repercussions of mass tourism. Micro, Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises, which are the spine of Mediterranean economies, have to deal with increased international competition and the challenges related to the digital and green transition. Young people, women in rural areas, people with disabilities often have to overcome specific barriers to be fully integrated in the labour market.

Yet, the Mediterranean is full of inspiring and motivated people who are ready and committed to make the Mediterranean a more stable, prosperous, and peaceful area to live in. The region has amazing landscapes, wonderful nature and is marked by cultural diversity that its inhabitants want to preserve for them and the future generations.

For all these reasons, the ENI CBC MED Programme considered a duty to shed light on the stories of some of these people who benefitted directly or indirectly from EU funds to improve the Mediterranean of today.

Between February 2022 and March 2024, we conducted online interviews with 30 individuals from both shores of the Mediterranean: the result is a collection of **24 compelling stories** featuring

individuals dedicated to enhancing their daily lives, communities and the environment they live in.

There are stories of people developing solutions to guarantee better use of water, reduce waste, rely more on renewable energies, better plan urban development, preserve cultural assets, fight prejudice about women, promote new models of social inclusion, transform consumption habits, and change mindsets.

This collection represents just a small fraction of the initiatives funded by the ENI CBC MED programme, yet it provides a glimpse into the potential of what can be achieved when creative, bright, and resilient persons cooperate across borders in the Mediterranean.

You may be surprised to learn about the importance of bees for our ecosystems, the daily life of a fisherman, the impact of some experiments that may change national legislation, the obstacles that young entrepreneurs face and overcome, a new model for elderly care based on ethical criteria and much more.

ENI CBC MED would like to sincerely thank all these people for their time and their will to share their stories.

Enjoyed reading them as much as we enjoy writing them.

SECTION ONE

FROM BEEKEEPING TO REDUCING FOOD WASTE: PRESERVING A SUSTAINABLE AND A HIGH-QUALITY AGRIFOOD SECTOR



On the 2022 World Bee Day (20 May), we gave voice to a Cypriot bee lover who turned beekeeping into a way of living and a way of making a living.

SPOTLIGHT ON THE POTENTIAL OF THE BEEKEEPING SECTOR IN CYPRUS

INTERVIEW WITH MS. GEORGIA SHOSHILOU

She is a member of the board of the Pancyprian Beekeepers Association, an associated partner of MedBEEsInessHubs project, and co-founder of G.S ECOPHYSIS Ltd, a family business that offers experiential and educational tours to visitors with special interests in the nature, rural lifestyle and traditional products of Cyprus. As a visitor, you can become a beekeeper for a day, make your own candle from beeswax, hike and discover wild plants and taste local products made out of honey.

The story started with a biologist falling in love with a beekeeper. That's how ECOPHYSIS Bee & Nature Center was born. They are both passionate. He offers the technical knowledge about beekeeping; she loves teaching about the importance of preserving the nature and has the scientific knowledge related to it. She also has the spirit of an entrepreneur and the will to always innovate and diversify her activities. They are like an open book and have no secrets to hide. And probably, this is one more reason why ECOPHYSIS Center' visitors appreciate them that much. They find authenticity, nature, a relaxing environment. They can enjoy it all with the great company of Georgia and her husband.

However, real life is not only about dreams coming true. Or at least, to turn your dreams into a reality, you need lots of hard work, patience, passion and trust.

But first of all, why bees are so important that in 2017, the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) declared the 20th May, World Bee Day?

THE POWER OF BEES ON NATURE, PEOPLE AND MINDS

As Georgia recalls, **over 50% of our food depends on pollinators** and bees are the most important ones. They preserve the biodiversity and thanks to them, we **ensure food security in the world**. The lockdown during the Covid-19 pandemic showed how many people started fearing from the possibility of lacking food while people like Georgia were confident as they live in the countryside and being beekeepers make them ensure there will be enough food.



**WE HAVE A LOT TO LEARN FROM BEES.
THEY MAKE US UNDERSTAND OUR POSITION IN NATURE**

GEORGIA SHOSHILOU

Bees are much more than guardians of our environment. They educate us. They make us understand our position in nature. They do not act like selfish creatures, they work in group, they have a goal to achieve, and they work hard for it.

Bees do not only ensure food production for people but also for animals. They make products of high value. Honey is not only a sweetener, but it also has anti-bacterial properties, it can act as a pain relief. Bees do not only produce honey. You can develop a wide range of products: propolis, cosmetics that do not expire, super food such as pollen or royal jelly. But it is true, that above all, they help us preserve the ecosystem.

**MEDITERRANEAN HONEY:
TASTIER AND WITH MORE NUTRIENTS**

Georgia has an answer to nearly all questions. She explains that due to the Mediterranean climate, the honey produced in Cyprus contains less humidity (about 13%), well below the humidity percentage found in other parts of Europe (up to 20%). This leads to produce a more concentrated honey, tastier and with more nutrients. As it has less humidity, it

also lasts longer than other types of honey without getting bad.

**CHALLENGES OF THE BEEKEEPING
SECTOR IN CYPRUS**

Knowing the importance of bees for people, the environment and all they can offer, why the bee sector is facing so many challenges in Cyprus and what can be done?

First of all, Cypriot honey competes with cheaper imported honey so beekeepers cannot keep up with such low prices. They cannot sell their jar of honey so that it does not even cover the cost of production. This turns it into a non-profitable sector and people see beekeeping as a hobby but not as a way to make a living. The sector needs professional beekeepers and cannot rely only on people doing it as a hobby otherwise the profession will disappear.

Like other productive sectors such as farming, beekeeping is not seen as an attractive job opportunity for young people. They associate it with working long hours under the sun with low income in return.





When Georgia asks the relevant department about the need to recruit someone to pursue her activities at ECHOPHYSIS, she faces administrative constraints due to the lack of flexibility. You either belong to the beekeeping sector or to another category. It is not foreseen that the same person can belong to the beekeeping sector, the educational one and the eco-touristic one which make her life more difficult when she tries to develop her business.

If consumers were valuing the products and willing to pay a fair price, if producers were also valuing their raw material asking for a fair price and if measures were taken to encourage the diversification of beekeeping activities, then the sector may flourish in Cyprus and in other Mediterranean regions.

**MEDBEESINESSHUBS OR HOW TO
SUPPORT YOUNG PEOPLE FROM RURAL
AREAS TO START THEIR BEEISNESS**

Georgia is a living example that as a young Mediterranean person, you can perfectly live from the bee sector. You need to think out of the box and see this sector as a whole and not only as beekeeping tasks.

You need to diversify the activity, and this requires more than technical skills related to beekeeping, such as administrative and financial management, marketing and even lobbying to make sure this sector is valued and recognised as it should be.

The PanCyprian Beekeeper Association supports beekeepers as it provides them with technical assistance. For example, there is vet who examines the hives, advise beekeepers to ensure the health of bees, how to handle them, how to store honey. The association also coordinates the different funds they receive from the State and the European Union. It also organises campaigns to promote the sector through festival, TV programmes or in schools.

Raising awareness at different levels: producers, consumers, children and adults about the importance of the sector and how it could benefit to all on economic and environmental level. Then training the younger generation so that they are fully prepared to start the BEE adventure are among MedBEEsinessHubs objectives which Georgia, her husband and the PanCyprian Beekeeper association are contributing to.



**WE NEED PROFESSIONALS IN THE BEEKEEPING SECTOR,
WE DON'T WANT TO DISAPPEAR**

GEORGIA SHOSHILOU



On the 2022 International Day for the Fight against Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing (5 June), we interviewed a Corsican fisherman to better understand the challenges Mediterranean fishermen are facing nowadays.

UNVEILING THE MANY FACETS OF A PROFESSIONAL FISHERMAN

INTERVIEW WITH MR. ALEXANDRE LUCCHINI FROM CORSICA, FRANCE

BEING A FISHERMAN IN THE MEDITERRANEAN: A FAMILY BUSINESS?

Alexandre Lucchini, fisherman since a year in Solenzara in the south of Corsica, took over his father's boat, works with his little brother who is a sailor and his mother who helps them with the administrative tasks and manages their fish shop. Fishing in the Mediterranean, a family business? It seems so.

Between the very restrictive European regulations, the bureaucratic and slowness of the national administration and bankers who are reluctant to grant loans to young fishermen, few young people have the desire and the means to embark on this profession.

If we add to this an inflexible training system which obliges students from maritime high schools to do their internships outside the fishing season, we take away the motivation to spark the interest for the job. Traineeships take place in winter, a period

when most of the work consists of maintaining the equipment and the trainees cannot go fishing. However, without transmitting this passion for fishing, there is little reason to want to start this adventure.

With an average age of 55 years old, Corsican fishermen continue to work once they retire, for lack of successors. At this rate, professional fishermen in Corsica are at risk of disappearing.

OVERVIEW OF THE LIFE OF A MEDITERRANEAN PROFESSIONAL FISHERMAN

Alexandre uses 4 fishing techniques which he distributes according to the seasonality of the species and the tourist season. With his brother, sailor on his boat and skipper of another smaller boat, they complement each other. He takes care of the offshore fish and his brother takes care of the land fishing. Thus, they cover a wider area and have access to a greater variety of species.

First, there is octopus fishing in a pot, an ancestral technique, already used by the Greeks. Then, trap fishing for lobster to avoid parasitic catches. After that, we move on to pelagic fish (tuna, swordfish) but for that, you have to obtain special fishing licenses, the famous European Fishing Authorizations (AEP).

particularly to set quotas by species on the basis of an average over the last 3 years. So, when an employee stops his working day, a fisherman, after his hard day at sea, has to start filling out forms and grant applications. He is also an entrepreneur and thinks about benefits.



**THE LONGER WE ARE AT SEA, THE MORE WE MAKE BENEFITS,
BUT IF WE HAVE TO DEVOTE 2 DAYS A WEEK DOING PAPERWORK,
IT IS NOT SUSTAINABLE**

ALEXANDRE LUCCHINI, CORSICAN FISHERMAN

Finally, before the season, they use the net to catch other types of fishes.

The day starts very early. We are in the Mediterranean and temperatures are getting higher and higher with climate change. Their boats are not brand new, and they do not have a refrigeration system, hence the importance of starting early in the morning. Back to the port, most of their catch is resold to wholesalers and through direct sales, and a smaller portion is resold to restaurants.

THE CHALLENGES OF THE FISHERMAN 2.0

A Corsican fisherman in 2022 has to face a lot of problems: lack of resources due to overfishing, lack of human resources (not enough sailors and administrative assistants), unfair competition with recreational fishing to name a few.

Nowadays, the administrative burden for a fisherman is such that he must either give up fishing one or two days a week to ensure this office work, or to recruit a person to take care of it. He has to fill forms for traceability, declarations, accounting. We must not forget the logbooks, a kind of history of their fishing over the season, which they have to fill in every day or every week depending on the size of the boat and within 24 to 48 hours. In these logbooks, they must fill in three-letter codes, set by the European Union, to indicate the species, their weight, the quantity caught, the quantity rejected. These data are used to monitor the health of the species and

WHEN PLEASURE FISHING THREATENS THE WORK OF FISHERMEN

On the 5th of June, we celebrate the International Day for the Fight against Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing. This date was chosen to recall the entry into force, on 5th June 2016, of the Agreement on Port State Measures to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing (adopted by the Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) in 2009). If this agreement mainly targets foreign vessels, the real threat for Corsican fishermen is the abusive practice of fishing by boaters. The latter are not subject to quotas for pelagic species and do not need an AEP license. So, **when a professional fisherman sees that a yachtsman is better equipped and fishes more during his weekend than a professional fisherman's working week, and sells the fish on the black market, there are good reasons to give up.**

This is the case of the dentex fish which has become a hot topic among fishermen on the island. Measures have been taken to limit this fishing among boaters, but we still need to have the means to ensure that they are applied. On the one hand, the maritime controllers are understaffed. On the other hand, it is much easier to control a professional fisherman than boaters on holidays.

PESCATOURISM, THE FUTURE OF PROFESSIONAL FISHERMEN?

Alexandre Lucchini adapts to the changing world and seizes the opportunities that arise such as



the FISH MED NET project to start diversifying his fishing activities. He takes tourists on board for a sea trip. He introduces them to his job, makes them aware of the marine environment and its reality as a fisherman. He would like to set up an *auberge bleue* in which he could welcome his visitors after their sea trip and proudly serve them the fruits of his labor.

When he takes visitors on his boat, he changes the type of category and hence the type of authorisation, so he must stay closer to the port and follow a strict security plan (much stricter than the neighbouring countries). Despite this, he sees in this activity, an opportunity both in terms of consumer awareness and in reducing his cost (the price of the ticket per visitor covers diesel, bait, etc.). Of course, **he fishes less but fishes better**. If we can serve the fishes we caught the same morning with visitors at a fairer price, we will not be obliged to sell our fish to restaurants at a price that will be resold twice once cooked.

**FLEXIBILITY, POOLING AND DIVERSIFICATION:
SOME THOUGHTS TO IMPROVE THE LIVES OF
FISHERMEN**

Regulations are necessary to preserve this threatened resource, but too many restrictions sometimes seem counterproductive.

There is an obvious lack of sailors and fishermen. Changing the period of internships for students in training to allow them to live the fishing experience and give them the spark for the job should not be very complicated.

Creating structures such as cooperatives to help fishermen with their administrative procedures should also be a way to explore. There are already some initiatives, but they are not enough.

Finally, the diversification of fishing activities should be facilitated to fishermen.

**BEING A FISHERMAN:
IT IS EXHAUSTING BUT PLEASANT**

Despite all these difficulties, for Alexandre, being a fisherman, is worth it. Every morning, he enjoys finding his boat in a beautiful setting (the best office view you can have). His job is obviously tiring and physically exhausting, but gives him a feeling of well-being, a psychological relief that is precious these days in a world that is going at full speed and which makes people stressed. In the evening, he has no trouble falling asleep. Finally, before going out to sea, Alexandre shares a final message: you have to shift prejudices about the profession of fisherman and make up your own mind before starting.



According to UN climate experts, between 25 and 30% of the food produced each year for human consumption – around 1.3 billion tonnes – is lost or wasted. For the International Day of Awareness of Food Waste (29 September), we shed light on the 2021 campaign organised in Tunisia as part of CLIMA project.

FIGHT AGAINST FOOD WASTE: HOW TO IMPROVE CONSUMERS' AWARENESS AND CHANGE THEIR HABITS? REFLECTIONS ON CLIMA PROJECT CAMPAIGN IN TUNISIA

INTERVIEW WITH MR. AMINE BOUNEOUES

On the International Day of Awareness of Food Loss and Waste (#IDAFLW) celebrated on the 29th of September by the United Nations, the ENI CBC MED programme met Mr. Amine Bouneoues, communication manager for the campaign to fight against food waste launched in Tunisia in September 2021 as part of the CLIMA project. A year later, in a context marked by increasing food prices, we have a look at this campaign and think about what can be done to continue reducing this waste in the long term.

WHEN FOOD PRICE IS CLOSELY LINKED TO FOOD WASTE

To try to understand the relationship that Tunisians have with basic food products, we must go back to the 1970s when the Tunisian state adopted Law 72 to encourage foreign capital investment. Therefore, the State decided to subsidize basic food products: bread, cereals, vegetable oils, concentrated tomatoes, etc.



**WE ARE AT THE RIGHT TIME TO
RELAUNCH THIS ANTI-FOOD WASTE
CAMPAIGN BECAUSE TUNISIANS
ARE MORE READY TO LISTEN TO
THIS KIND OF MESSAGES.**

AMINE BOUNEOUES



This subsidy policy allows people to eat at a very affordable price but has indirectly generated eating habits that make it difficult for the new generation to understand the real price of food. How can a young person who has always paid 0.06 euros a bread in bakeries, be aware of the real cost of bread? Its production involves raw material (wheat), the consumption of water and energy, transport, storage, etc. making the real price much higher than what the person is used to pay.

Moreover, the lack of law in Tunisia on unsold products does not favour the fight against food waste. Throwing away unsold food seems to cost less than distributing it.

WHEN WE HIT PEOPLE'S POCKETS

It is hard to link this kind of behaviour to people's age or the place where they live. Did our grandparents waste less? Most probably yes. Do people in rural areas throw away less than people in cities? Wasting less in rural areas might be true as there are usually poorer.

Even though there are no exact statistics to link these possible relationships between age, region

and food waste, the main argument that makes people react is when you hit their pockets. The proof is that during the holy month of Ramadan, food waste tended to increase but since the rise in the price of vegetable oils, an essential ingredient to prepare tasty dishes and pastries, there has been a slight drop in food waste.

900,000 LOAVES OF BREAD THROWN AWAY PER DAY IN TUNISIA

In 2017, the Tunisian National Consumer Institute, in collaboration with the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), carried out a study which showed that 900,000 loaves of bread are thrown away every day in Tunisia. It is from this figure that the idea came to highlight this kind of data and draw the attention to the consumer.

WHY WASTE WHEN YOU KNOW THE TIPS?

Mr. Bouneoues, as a Tunisian journalist and knowing well the habits of Tunisians with the media, came up with the campaign against food waste launched in Tunisia with civil society partners and in the framework of the CLIMA project back in September



2021 during 3 weeks. First, the campaign focused on social networks, in particular through the creation of a Facebook page and an Instagram account with the campaign slogan “why waste when you have the tips?”. Then, a campaign was launched through a press conference and with the participation of more traditional media such as television and radio. For example, local stars were invited to radio programs to share their anti-waste recipes.

A LONG-TERM AND TIMELY ANTI-WASTE CAMPAIGN

Beyond the figures on the number of visitors on social networks and their ratings, it is difficult to assess the real impact of this kind of campaign. According to Mr. Bouneoues, for this kind of campaign to be more effective, it should be run on the long term and not just for 3 weeks. In addition, the timing of the campaign launch is key. Currently, it would be very relevant to relaunch this kind of campaign, at a time when international circumstances affect the price of food (energy crisis, war in Ukraine, drought) and when the Tunisian government is negotiating new conditions with the International Monetary Fund by questioning the model based on subsidies

on finished products. It is now that Tunisians need to be accompanied so that they adapt to the new reforms which are about to be implemented. We are at a time when the housewife pays close attention to these tips.

A NEW LABIB ADAPTED TO THE CHALLENGES OF TODAY’S SOCIETY?

Ask any Tunisian who grew up in the 1990s and 2000s about Labib and you will see that this mascot marked an entire generation. Created by the Ministry of the Environment at the time, this blue fennec was not only present in schools, on television and on the radio, but it was also erected as a statue in most Tunisian cities. Disappeared in 2012, the current government wants to relaunch it this year.

Beyond a revamped Labib, Tunisians need a real commitment to educate new generations about environmental issues. It is time to reinvent a Labib in line with current concerns and the reality of the consequences of climate change. **It is time to invest on the new generation and introduce environmental education in school textbooks.**



Harmonizing regulations among Mediterranean countries, promoting cooperatives to reduce cost of fertilisers and certification to farmers and providing incentives to young farmers are some key issues to boost organic agriculture in the region.

ORGANIC ECOSYSTEM: A PROJECT TO PROMOTE ORGANIC AGRICULTURE IN THE MEDITERRANEAN REGION

INTERVIEW WITH MS. MARA SEMERARO FROM ITALY AND MS. TAMAM AL-KHAWALDA FROM JORDAN

GOING ORGANIC!

Going organic is not only trendy. It is good for us and for our planet. Organic products are healthy as they do not contain toxic chemicals, are not genetically modified, contain fewer synthetic fertilizers, etc. It is good for nature as it helps preserve the biodiversity, keeps a more fertile soil. Adding to that, organic agriculture uses less water and energy.

A STRUCTURE FOR A MEDITERRANEAN ORGANIC AGRICULTURE?

At the European Union level, regulations exist and the latest one entered in force on 1st January 2022 tackling organic production and labelling of organic products (Regulation (EU) 2018/848). However, addressing Mediterranean organic agriculture including partner countries located outside the European Union is much more challenging as each country has its own characteristics, legislation and pace to introduce regulation and certification methods to guarantee reliable organic production.

One of the initiatives towards boosting and supporting a Mediterranean organic agriculture value chain was the establishment of an institutional network of Ministries of Agriculture, the Mediterranean Organic Agriculture Network (MOAN) in 2006. It gathers representatives of Ministries of Agriculture from 24 countries all over the Mediterranean. Its secretariat is based at the International Centre for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Institute (CIHEAM) in Bari, Italy.

This institute together with the Jordanian Ministry of Agriculture form part of an EU-funded project called ORGANIC ECOSYSTEM ("Boosting cross border Organic Ecosystem through enhancing agro-food alliances"). To better understand the state of organic agriculture in the Mediterranean region, we interviewed two partners involved in this project: Mara Semeraro (CIHEAM-Bari) and Tamam Al-Khawalda from the Jordanian Ministry of Agriculture, organic agriculture division, which is the lead beneficiary of the project.

MAIN CONSTRAINTS OF MEDITERRANEAN ORGANIC AGRICULTURE

According to Mrs. Semeraro, the main constraint is the lack of a constant political, financial and strategical support at Mediterranean level that takes into account the diversities and needs of each country. In this context, the fact that a network has been created through ORGANIC ECOSYSTEM to include not only ministries of agriculture but also farmers, certification bodies and even consumers is something that has to continue to overcome the lack of a common methodology.

WHILE MRS. AL-KHAWALDA HIGHLIGHTS OTHER OBSTACLES.

From the producer point of view, the price of inputs (i.e., fertilisers) and the cost to get the certification of organic products are so high that it discourages farmers to go organic. For example, in Jordan, a farmer would need to pay about 1,000 Jordanian dinars (JOD) (1,293 €) to get the certification. The average salary of a Jordanian farmer is about 375 JOD per month (491 €).

Form the consumer perspective, very few people are willing and can afford paying 3 to 4 time the price of regular products to get organic ones. For instance, one kilo of tomatoes would cost around 0,5 JOD and organic one would be around 1.5 to 2 JOD/ kg.

In Italy and probably in other European countries, although organic products witnessed a boom right after the lockdown due to COVID-19 and an increasing awareness about healthy food, this tendency is not that significant anymore with a nearly 10 % inflation hitting households' budget since a year.

WHAT CAN BE DONE TO IMPROVE AND PROMOTE ORGANIC AGRICULTURE IN THE MEDITERRANEAN?

At macro regional level, the key point is to try to harmonize the regulation. This will help the organic market especially knowing that we are dealing a lot with imports and exports between Mediterranean countries.

At national or more local level, ministries and relevant authorities should promote the creation of cooperatives so that farmers gather and reduce the cost of certification.

In a region marked with high unemployment rate and a very young population especially in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, incentives should be proposed to young people: facilitate the procedures to own a piece of land, get organic seeds, assume cost related to access to water (digging wells) together with the technical experience of agronomists who can support farmers in organic farming techniques.

Unfortunately, although international organisations fund programmes to promote organic agriculture in the region, there are too many cases of failure as the farms closed once the fund stops. For example, in the case of a project in Jordan that supported financially 55 farmers, after 4 years, when the project closed, only 10 remains (18 %).

It is of utmost importance to direct the funds to the right people and ensure effective sustainability plans beyond the project's closure.

ORGANIC ECOSYSTEM'S CONTRIBUTION TO MEDITERRANEAN ORGANIC AGRICULTURE

Through this project, three main results are worth mentioning. First, **a network has been created as a pilot action and include farmers and cooperatives in countries involved in ORGANIC ECOSYSTEM project, to enlarge the Mediterranean Organic Agriculture Network (MOAN) to other organic stakeholders.** This is the result of many analysis and interviewing relevant stakeholders in each participating country of the project.

Second, a big work of matching has been done to **match farmers with innovators/ SMEs** as well as matching cross border partners. Third, the creation of business alliances enabled farmers from different Mediterranean countries meet, exchange and collaborate together.

Within the project, field visits were organised where for example, Jordanian operators (farmers, agri-food processors) went to Italy to get to know what is being done there and to exchange best practices and ideas.

To sum up, this cross-border cooperation helped increase the work capacity of all involved people. All partners shared one methodology but each one developed its activities respecting the experience of its country.

SECTION TWO

MOBILISING EFFORTS FOR THE ENERGY TRANSITION AND PROMOTING WATER REUSE IN THE MEDITERRANEAN REGION



**Strengthening technical capacities,
networks of SMEs and pilot
installations: find out the solutions
implemented by MAIA-TAQA project
for the development of renewable
energy in the Mediterranean.**

MAIA-TAQA PROJECT COMMITMENT TO A SUSTAINABLE ENERGY TRANSITION IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

INTERVIEW WITH MR. NAJI ABI ZEID AND MS. JOELLE CHEBLI FROM LEBANON

MAIA-TAQA is an innovation project which focuses on energy efficiency and the promotion of renewable energies in the Mediterranean region. But what does MAIA-TAQA mean?

MAIA-TAQA: WATER-ENERGY, KEY SECTORS FOR SURVIVAL

This acronym, which seems innocuous to non-Arabic speakers, simply means water-energy in Middle Eastern dialect. What could be more important than tackling these two sectors, essential for the survival of people and more particularly in a country such as Lebanon which has been plunged into unprecedented crises since 2019.

MOBILIZE NEW AREAS OF INVESTMENT AND TOGETHER IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF LIFE FOR ALL

This is the title of the MAIA-TAQA project, funded by the European Union under the ENI CBC MED programme, which brings together 8 partners from 6 Mediterranean countries. Launched in September 2019, this project offers different solutions to address the various obstacles that prevent the deployment of renewable energies. In particular, it proposes a capacity building program to overcome the lack of skills; an innovation desk to tackle the lack of access to information; guidelines due to the lack of regulation; vouchers due to lack of funding and targeted Business to Business (B2B) events due to the lack of specific matchmaking.

Three pilot experiments have been set up in Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon, addressing different angles of energy efficiency.

In Egypt, the solar panel equipment of the fruit and vegetable wholesale market (El Amreya) in Alexandria was inaugurated in February 2022. This market is the first to be entirely powered by solar panels in Egypt.

In Jordan, the installation of a solar thermal cooling system on the Aqaba Chamber of Commerce building in southern Jordan, the first of its kind in the country, was inaugurated in October 2022.

Finally, in Lebanon, the installation of a pilot wastewater treatment plant that runs on solar energy at the headquarters of the Industrial Research Institute (IRI) on the campus of the Lebanese University in Hadat, south of Beirut was inaugurated in June 2023.

WASTEWATER TREATMENT AND SOLAR ENERGY: THE EXPERIENCE IN LEBANON

In order to better understand the ins and outs of a project like MAIA-TAQA, ENI CBC MED programme interviewed the Lebanese partner, the Industrial Research Institute (IRI). Director of the Euro-Lebanese Center for Industrial Modernization (ELCIM) within the IRI, Mr. Naji Abi Zeid, and the communication manager, Ms. Joelle Chebli took the time to share their experience on the MAIA-TAQA project and to explain to us a little more about the situation of renewable energies in Lebanon.



EITHER WE STAY IN THE DARK OR WE TURN TO SOLAR ENERGY

NAJI ABI ZEID, DIRECTOR OF ECLIM

THE USE OF SOLAR ENERGY IN LEBANON: A NECESSITY

Since 2019, Lebanon has been trying to survive the multiple crises it is going through. Let us recall the devaluation of the Lebanese pound by 98% of its value between 2019 and 2023 and without going into the long list of crises and disasters, we can mention in this specific case, the repeated power cuts for lack of fuel and existence of dilapidated infrastructure among others. With the high increase in oil prices, Lebanese people had not even enough to power the electric generators, fuel-guzzler, to compensate for the breakdowns which endanger the lives of people (i.e., hospitals without electricity), causing power outages in cold chain which leads to the spoilage of food and obviously the discomfort of daily life without electricity (no pressure for the water to arrive), bringing almost everything to a standstill.

Faced with this situation and thanks to the resilience of the Lebanese, they began to install solar panels not out of ecological awareness but out of pure necessity. Without having foreseen it, this led to exceeding the objective of 12% of primary energy consumption coming from renewable energies set in the Lebanese national action plan for energy efficiency for the period 2016-2020 according to Mr. Abi Zeid.

As Mr. Abi Zeid sums up very well, either we stay in the dark or we turn to solar energy. Ms. Chebli adds that this demonstrates how this problem has turned into an opportunity and makes it possible to increase the

share of solar energy in energy supply. That being said, the chaotic installation of solar panels on the roofs of buildings remains to be regulated. While solar panels can partially solve the energy problem, this will not be able to cover more than 30 to 40% of the energy demand. Other sources of energy are being studied such as wind energy, but this is not entirely conclusive at the moment (lack of available surface area, noise pollution for the neighbourhood to name a few constraints).

WHY IS THE MAIA-TAQA PILOT WASTEWATER TREATMENT PLANT INNOVATIVE IN LEBANON?

First of all, this wastewater treatment plant runs entirely on solar energy, which is a novelty in Lebanon. But what is also innovative is that this experiment was able to be carried out as part of a public initiative. This station makes it possible to water the gardens and green spaces around the IRI buildings within the Lebanese University campus.

In a country where the majority of people turn to the private sector to solve their structural problems, being able to implement a solution to a water treatment problem by public entities was a real challenge. Once identified, the goal of the ELCIM team is to maintain the operation of this station beyond the end of the project, which is planned and guaranteed by the Center itself. In addition, ELCIM plans to extend the area covered by irrigation to an area of 2,500 square meters (currently it covers 700 square meters). Finally, the ultimate objective is to replicate this station in other parts of the country.

WHAT ARE THE MAIN OBSTACLES TO REPLICATING THE PILOT STATION?

Even if this pilot experiment demonstrates its feasibility through a reduction in water costs for irrigation, in electricity to operate the station and has a positive impact on the environment, investors are still reluctant.

Treating wastewater is a sensitive issue, and even more since a cholera epidemic broke out in Akkar, in the north of the country in October 2022, which only worsened the health problem and access to clean water. To invest in this sector, there is a lack of initial financing, not enough government regulations in this area, and a lack of awareness of environmental issues.

Health concerns should encourage the establishment of wastewater treatment plants but all the issues linked to the country's economic priorities take over.

In short, venturing in a sector like this one is not easy in the current economic and social situation in Lebanon. Finally, it also depends on the industrial sector in which investors are willing to take a risk. Sectors such as dairy products represent a greater health risk in the application of standards and monitoring of production quality, even if the establishment of a wastewater treatment plant is crucial in this kind of industry.

MAIA-TAQA: MUCH MORE THAN PILOT EXPERIMENTS IN RENEWABLE ENERGIES

This project is not limited to the 3 pilot experiments mentioned above. In parallel with the implementation of these pilots, a whole section of capacity building was carried out. In Lebanon, around 60 people were trained in the renewable energy sector (mainly engineers and SMEs), 2 trainers were certified and in turn provided training. 3 SMEs obtained vouchers for innovation services worth 20,000 euros per voucher through an Innovation One Stop Shop (IOSS). Similar results were obtained in Egypt and Jordan.

Brokerage events between companies in the renewable energy sector from several Mediterranean countries were organized, which enabled connecting these companies and sign agreements for the exchange of expertise and know-how.

Finally, what makes MAIA TAQA a successful project is above all the dynamism and good understanding between the partners. Mr. Naji Abi Zeid and Ms. Chebli have taken ownership of the project which has become a mission that exceeds the ambitions of the project. The ENI CBC MED programme would like to thank them and wish them good luck in continuing to build and strengthen the capacities of new generations in this region of the world which is full of potential.



THE PROJECT ENDS BUT THE MISSION CONTINUES

JOELLE CHEBLI, MAIA TAQA COMMUNICATION MANAGER





Through pilot installations, training and capacity-building initiatives, NAWAMED and MEDWAYCAP projects have demonstrated that water reuse is a feasible solution for many Mediterranean countries, including water-scarce Malta.

NAWAMED AND MEDWAYCAP PROJECTS IMPLEMENT INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS TO TACKLE WATER SCARCITY IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

INTERVIEW WITH MR. MANUEL SAPIANO FROM MALTA

Through pilot installations, training, and capacity-building activities, NAWAMED and MEDWAYCAP projects have demonstrated that water reuse is a feasible solution for many Mediterranean countries, including Malta, the most water-stressed European country and one of the top ten most water-scarce countries in the world. Learn more about the solutions implemented by the projects in discussion with Mr. Manuel Sapiano, Chief Executive Officer at Malta's Energy and Water Agency.

WATER SCARCITY IN MALTA

Malta is the smallest country of the European Union with its highest population density. It lacks rivers and lakes, and its water resources mainly rely on deep ground water and desalination. In fact, the country has been using the technique of desalination since 1982 to produce water from seawater.

Not only it is densely populated but also there is a significant increase of the population between 2000 and 2022: from 390 000 to 523 000 according to data from the World Bank. Adding to that

the number of tourists has risen up adding the equivalent population between 40,000 and 90,000 persons on a single day (depending on the season).

On average, **every person in Malta uses 110 litres of water per day** which is one of the lowest household water consumptions compared to other European Member States. About 2 to 3 litres for drinking and cooking, 40 litres to take a shower and the same amount to flush the toilet. In a country that has limited natural water resources, it is a high priority to find more sustainable means of addressing demands which require lower quality.

In this context, the ENI CBC MED programme wanted to know more about this reality that faces Malta. As the Energy and Water Agency (EWA) of Malta takes part in 2 ENI CBC MED funded projects namely NAWAMED (a standard project) and MEDWAYCAP (a capitalisation project), we took the time to listen to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of this agency, Mr. Sapiano, to better understand the challenges and possible solutions to tackle water scarcity on the island.

NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS TO ADDRESS WATER SCARCITY

Mr. Sapiano has a background in water management with specific focus on islands. As CEO of the Energy and Water Agency, he first emphasized on the **policy role of the agency** which support the central government of Malta in developing policies for the water and energy sectors. We cannot tackle these 2 sectors without taking into account interdependencies with other sectors such as the industrial, the agricultural or the touristic ones. Therefore, the agency has also a cross ministerial role.

Although Malta did not implement a pilot installation in the framework of NAWAMED project, EWA's participation was so relevant especially when it comes to the development of policies to address the integration of nature-based solutions in water management. But first of all, what does this project exactly address?

NAWAMED stands for Nature-Based Solutions for Domestic Water Reuse in Mediterranean Countries. In the context of this project, 8 pilots have been implemented in Jordan (Green Wall and bioretention systems), in Lebanon (2 Constructed Wetlands and a Living Wall and a Green Façade), in Tunisia (Living Green Wall) and in Italy (Green Wall) which are quite innovative. Most of these pilots were realised in buildings where there is a high consumption and high flow of water such as students' dormitories.

NAWAMED IMPACT ON ADOPTING WATER REUSE TECHNIQUE IN MALTA

The main idea behind these pilots was to demonstrate the feasibility of reusing grey water. The Maltese partner exchanged a lot with the other partners, learned from their experiences and started to study the feasibility of applying the technique of water reuse but to even smaller scale such as households. Imagine that you could **reuse the water of the shower to flush the toilet**, this would reduce the daily consumption from 110 to 70 litres per person **saving 40 litres of water per day and per person!**

Unfortunately, such technique is still not financially and legally feasible in Malta. For example, building standards need to be updated to consider piping systems for second class water in buildings (to divert the pipes from shower to toilet and ensure that there is no cross contamination of water). Addressing water reuse does not only cover water but also and most importantly health issues. In this sense, the current legislation in Malta stipulates that water from shower and wash bases has to go through a grid to a drain. Therefore, to implement water reuse, a change in the legislation and the establishment of quality standards to ensure its safe use are required.

One of the most important results of NAWAMED was the formulation of a regional policy document for promoting the adoption of nature-based solutions





ACCEPTANCE OF WATER REUSE IS DIFFICULT IN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES BECAUSE OTHER ALTERNATIVE WATER RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE

MR. SAPIANO, CEO OF ENERGY AND WATER AGENCY IN MALTA

in the urban environment. This document will form the basis of a proposal for a national policy for Malta to regulate the adoption of greywater reuse solutions which will be presented to the relevant Maltese authorities by the end of 2023. As a consequence, this will see Malta opening the debate on greywater treatment and reuse with the aim of developing a national regulatory framework for promoting the adoption of greywater management solutions.

PREPARING NEXT GENERATION OF QUALIFIED EMPLOYEES IN THE WATER REUSE SECTOR

During the interview, Mr. Sapiano compared between the sectors of renewable energies and water reuse in terms of both technologies providing opportunities for the development of alternative resources at the point of use. In order to implement new techniques of water reuse, there is a need of a governance framework.

There is also a need to have trained and qualified people to install and ensure the maintenance of installed systems. In this sense, the capacity building part of NAWAMED was also very relevant. Once these aspects are addressed and the market of water reuse is regulated, one would expect that the price of technology will decrease, and this technique will also progressively become economically feasible.

THE RELEVANCE OF TACKLING WATER REUSE AT MEDITERRANEAN AND NOT EUROPEAN LEVEL

According to Mr. Sapiano, the term “water reuse” is challenging when addressing water management at European level simply because most Member States of the European Union have more than sufficient natural water resources. However, dealing with water reuse with other Mediterranean



**WHEN YOU DEVELOP A COOPERATION PROJECT,
YOU ALSO DEVELOP FRIENDSHIPS WHICH LEAD
TO A LONG-TERM COOPERATION**

MR. SAPIANO, CEO OF ENERGY AND WATER AGENCY IN MALTA

countries (inside and outside the EU) is easier since they are sharing a common challenge: water scarcity. These Mediterranean countries are facing the same challenge but are usually developing solutions in isolation. And here comes the interest and the weight of a cross border cooperation programme in the Mediterranean such as ENI CBC MED.

LESSONS LEARNED FROM MEDITERRANEAN COOPERATION ON WATER REUSE

Despite some disparities in terms of data access in Mediterranean Partner Countries and other constraints, there is a real added value of cooperation between both shores of the Mediterranean in the water sector. For instance, the implementation of pilots is very important.

Not only it is an effective way to demonstrate the feasibility of the technique but also a strong base to exchange and enrich each other's experience. In the south shore of the Mediterranean, the location of the pilots was very important, where the partners made efforts to have the pilots implemented in locations with a high visibility and hence improve the outreach with the population.

Once partners work together and meet frequently, they discuss more openly and start to trust each other and are willing to share information not only about their successes but also and more importantly about their failures. At the end of the day, they do not pretend to develop the latest technology but simply to share knowledge and adapt solutions to the reality of each one's country.

RAINWATER HARVESTING: ANOTHER PART OF THE SOLUTION

Besides water reuse, collecting rainwater through reservoirs is also a good Nature-based Solution used in Malta. MEDWAYCAP as a capitalization project is a good way to showcase different solutions and share good practices. In the case of Malta, EWA included Alteraqua, a private co-funded project to demonstrate the restoration of historical reservoirs on the island as a feasible technique to have clean water for sustaining green initiatives. Alteraqua also has a strong capacity building and outreach component to further facilitate raising awareness on rainwater harvesting applications.

In this context, a capitalization project allows cross fertilization of ideas coming from the application of different techniques in different contexts and allows experts to learn from experiences in other countries.

BUILDING WATER RESILIENCE FOR THE FUTURE

The main challenge of Malta for the coming years is ensuring a reliable security of water supply. Although, the country has relied on desalination, it cannot keep increasing supplies, and must increasingly develop sustainable solutions. The main effort should therefore focus on developing water reuse techniques, raise more awareness of the population, train people and demonstrate that there is also a lot of green jobs opportunities than can come out from implementing water reuse. Water reuse can complement existing water management frameworks and ensure a higher level of sustainability for the future.

SECTION THREE

SHAPING A SUPPORTIVE ECOSYSTEM FOR MEDITERRANEAN ENTREPRENEURS



Besides training, coaching, mentoring and funds, aspiring entrepreneurs need mental health support and more cross-border networking to open up and overcome the many constraints towards sustainable entrepreneurship.

INTECMED AND EMPHASIS PROJECTS GUIDED ASPIRING ENTREPRENEURS IN THEIR JOURNEY TOWARDS A MORE INNOVATIVE MEDITERRANEAN

INTERVIEW WITH MS. MAI DARWISH AND MS. NADA ELSHARKAWY FROM EGYPT

Early October 2023, ENI CBC MED programme interviewed two Egyptian ladies who have been actively involved in the implementation of two projects funded by this programme: INTECMED and EMPHASIS. Both projects tackle transfer of technology and innovation in the Mediterranean region. These two ladies, Mai Darwish and Nada Elsharkawy, **accompanied students, researchers, and young professionals in their journey towards entrepreneurship.**

TURN BRIGHT IDEAS INTO REAL INNOVATIVE PROJECTS: SUPPORTING EGYPTIANS FROM THE GOVERNORATES

In a centralized country such as Egypt where most of the opportunities are concentrated in the capital, Cairo, and to a certain extent in Alexandria, it is not always easy to find projects that are targeting other

governorates. While there are still a lot to do to foster a good environment for entrepreneurs including tackling Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) issues, Egypt is on the track so that entrepreneurs can flourish.

Mai Darwish, INTECMED technical expert at the Confederation of Egyptian European Business Associations (CEEBA), explains that the INTECMED mentoring scheme for entrepreneurs included different parts. When the people were selected, they first entered an incubation period with a training, then they benefitted from a one-to-one coaching. Later on, they received the services of a specialised consultant in the field of their projects. Afterwards, they did a bootcamp and participated in business to business events nationally and abroad to match what they offer with the investors' needs. In Egypt, 11 mentees took part and 3 of them received a grant to develop their projects.



REACHING GOVERNORATES SUCH AS KAHR EL SHEIKH OR AL SHARQIYAH IS ONE OF THE CHARACTERISTICS OF ENI CBC MED AS IT TARGETS TERRITORIES THAT NEED MORE SUPPORT THAN THE CAPITAL

MAI DARWISH

For Mai, this way of accompanying these aspiring entrepreneurs is a complete and sustainable way of doing it as it does not only consist in supporting them financially but assist them in each step with a full range of tools and services. By targeting remote areas outside Alexandria governorate, it makes even more sense as there is **a larger outreach but also it contributes to level up the standards in these regions.**

As technical expert, Mai did not find difficulties in finding mentors to assess the mentees. However, it was more difficult to find consultants that can provide tailored services for each project. Besides reaching out aspiring entrepreneurs from other governorates and even if the level of English was low, one of great added value of INTECMED were the B2B meetings in other countries. It really helps broaden the scope, immerse these mentees in the business, share similar challenges with other Mediterranean researchers and meet possible investors to better understand their strategies.

Unlike INTECMED, EMPHASIS focused on the creation of an open innovation platform and provided support to SMEs but without grants as explained Nada, communication manager of EMPHASIS at CEEBA. In this case, they focused on other aspects. One of them was **to present some business ideas to experts who audited their proposals and provided them with a detailed report.** Besides that, training was provided in April and May 2023 as well as many twinning activities that took place to match SMEs between both shores of the Mediterranean. In the case of Egypt, 4 SMEs benefitted from these open innovation support services.

PATIENCE, EMBRACE DIFFERENCES AND OPEN YOUR MIND: KEY LESSONS LEARNED

For both Mai and Nada, managing such projects drastically changed them. They learned to be more patient, to embrace cultural differences within their own country, to support people in changing the mindsets regarding how we do business and to embrace the excitement of the aspiring entrepreneurs.

For Mai, it is crucial to understand the cultural differences that exists from one governorate to another before starting this type of journey which lasts for several months.

The project does not stop when the activities are realised. You have to follow up and adapt the communication through different channels and in a way it suits each personality. It is not about micro-management but about being involved and be part of the team.

For Nada, patience and learn different ways of working were the key lessons. Then, when you embrace the excitement of the aspiring entrepreneurs, you forget about the multiple constraints.

INCLUDE MENTAL HEALTH AND PSYCHOLOGY IN THE TRAINING AND INCREASE CROSS BORDER MEETINGS

When Mai was asked what she would recommend for future projects dealing with aspiring entrepreneurs, she immediately mentioned the need to include



mental health and psychology in the content of the entrepreneurs' trainings. One can't image all the pressures entrepreneurs undergo. Many of them had a burn out. From changing the mindset (switching from the status of an employee, a researcher to the mindset of an entrepreneur), to work hard to be selected in one the funding programmes, negotiate, convince, focus on the technical part, let alone the obstacles related to the economic crisis. This is a lot and does not only concern entrepreneurs from Egypt but also from other participating countries such as Tunisia and Greece.

As for the cross-border dimension, it is a real added value. She would definitely recommend to plan more cross border meetings between entrepreneurs from different countries. It is essential for entrepreneurs

and was also inspiring for us as project staff. For instance, when Mai went to Seville, Spain, she was impressed to see how the Spanish partner had organised the innovation hub inaugurated in the framework of INTECMED. From the decoration of the hub, attractive to the entrepreneurs, to the way they accompany them in each step, she compared it to a baby who goes through different stages to become an adult. The Spanish partner could immediately spot the strengths and the weaknesses of each project, offer solutions and be with the entrepreneur in his/her journey to achieve his/her dream.

ENI CBC MED programme congratulates Mai and Nada for managing such challenging projects and wish them a great journey in the world of cooperation projects!



**PATIENCE, BEING OPEN AND LEARN TO WORK DIFFERENTLY:
THIS IS WHAT I REALLY LEARNED FROM A PROJECT LIKE EMPHASIS**

NADA ELSHARKAWY



In a context of globalization marked by a demand for safe, traceable and quality products, the dairy sector in the Mediterranean must transform itself in order to remain competitive. Find out how the TRANSDAIRY project contributes to the modernization of the dairy value chain through technology transfer.

TRANSDAIRY PROJECT BOOSTS TECHNOLOGY TRANSFER IN THE MEDITERRANEAN DAIRY SECTOR

INTERVIEW WITH DR. FATMA TRABELSI FROM TUNISIA

As part of the TRANSDAIRY project which focuses on the use of Key Enabling Technologies (KET) to improve the value chain of the dairy sector in the Mediterranean, ENI CBC MED programme took the time to discuss with Dr. Fatma Trabelsi to find out more about the transfer of technologies in Tunisia and more concretely on the experience of the implementation of this project. Dr. Fatma Trabelsi is a hydrogeologist and geomatician. She is a teacher, researcher at the Higher School of Engineers of Medjez El Bab (ESIM), part of the University of Jendouba and the Institution of Agricultural Research and Higher Education (IRESA), coordinator and communication director of the TRANSDAIRY project in Tunisia. She is also one of the National Contact Points for the European research program Horizon Europe.

MAIN OBSTACLES FOR STUDENT RESEARCHERS AND THE TRANSFER OF RESEARCH RESULTS IN TUNISIA

Ms. Trabelsi main motivation for engaging in such a project, knowing that the dairy sector is not her area of expertise, is to help researchers create businesses and improve technology transfer. According to her, researchers in Tunisia are full of talent but lack of financial and legislative means to be able to develop this potential.

Tunisian researchers are very well ranked in terms of scientific publications but this ranking drop when we refer to number of patents or the commercialization of research results.



**TUNISIAN RESEARCHERS ARE VERY WELL RANKED
IN TERMS OF SCIENTIFIC PUBLICATIONS BUT THIS RANKING
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PATENTS OR THE COMMERCIALIZATION OF RESEARCH RESULTS**

**FATMA TRABELSI,
COORDINATOR OF TRANSDAIRY IN TUNISIA**

The researcher is not in the best environment that allow him/her to apply research results via the creation of a spin-off (a company created from knowledge and technologies resulting from research, often from a university).

Indeed, when the TRANSDAIRY project was written in 2018, the notion of spin-off was still in its beginning in this country and even if a few projects and experiences supported by international donors made it possible to develop the status of student-entrepreneur, it is still new. In this regard, you can consult the document on the implementation of the “Student-entrepreneur” status which dates from November 8, 2019.

Ms Trabelsi would like to present a study on the experience of spin-offs within the framework of TRANSDAIRY project to two ministries: the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research and the Ministry of Agriculture, water resources and fishing.

For example, currently we do not know whether the income from spin-offs benefits the research team or the institution to which it belongs (the university). In short, there is an urgent need to adapt the Tunisian legislation to better regulate the status of the researcher-entrepreneur and facilitate technology transfer.

TRANSDAIRY OR HOW KEY ENABLING TECHNOLOGIES CAN BENEFIT THE DAIRY SECTOR IN THE MEDITERRANEAN REGION?

The starting point for the implementation of this project is **the identification of the needs of farmers** to improve the value chain of the dairy sector and **analyse the potential of researchers** in the 4 participating countries: Greece, Italy, Lebanon and Tunisia.

To do this, TRANSDAIRY partners began by creating focus groups made up of all stakeholders in the field, namely farmers, dairy sector manufacturers, technology experts, engineers, researchers, professionals from the general directorates of the Ministry of Agriculture, Hydraulic Resources and Fisheries in the case of Tunisia.

Through these consultations, it emerged that the **main challenge of the sector in Tunisia relates to the quality of milk followed by stock management and transport.** This challenge is also present in Greece. Whereas in Lebanon and Italy, the challenge relates more to improving the cheese making process.

When one thinks of quality of milk, he/she thinks of the breed of cattle and nature of pastures. A researcher proposed to promote a product present in Tunisian forests to improve the quality of livestock feed, but the major problem lies in how to maintain the quality of the milk at a good temperature, a good pH level and not to damage the raw material while it is being transported from the producer to the dairy plant as well as the management of surplus and deficit periods.

This is where researchers come in, proposing, thanks to nanotechnologies, for example, systems that guarantee better traceability of livestock, biosensors to measure the acidity level and the quality of water or rennets that improve the fermentation.

TRANSDAIRY: A REAL BOOST FOR RESEARCHERS AND TECHNOLOGY TRANSFER?

Once the needs were identified, the partners set the same criteria in all participating countries to choose the candidates who will benefit from the trainings.

Two types of training were carried out. **Training for trainers** aimed at researcher support structures. In Tunisia, these are the University Technology Transfer Offices (BuTT in French). BuTT staff were able to follow training on intellectual patents, the creation of business plans and marketing plans to support young researcher-entrepreneurs to create a spin-off or a business. **The second type of training was for researchers** providing innovative solutions in Bio-nanotechnologies and ICT applied to the Dairy Value Chain (DVC). The selected candidates followed training on entrepreneurship, marketing, etc.

Brokerage events were carried out in Tunisia and Lebanon to strengthen visibility, networking and boost the capacity and commercial



performance of spin-off project leaders in Bio-Nanotechnologies and ICT applied to the DVC in the four Mediterranean countries (Italy, Lebanon, Greece and Tunisia). These events were very good opportunities for all innovators from these countries to meet and exchange with each other and with DVC experts, private sector investors and national and international donors through round tables of networking and B2B meetings.

During brokerage events organized in Tunisia and Lebanon, competitions were organized to award vouchers in three different categories:

- **Co-publication:** groups of researchers benefited from vouchers worth 2,000 euros to cover scientific publication costs.
- **Co-patenting:** vouchers worth 8,000 euros cover international co-patenting costs.
- **Demonstration:** these vouchers cover the costs of demonstrating prototypes worth 4,000 euros.
- Finally, **grants were awarded for the creation of spin-offs** at the national level, worth 10,000 euros each.



WHILE THE TUNISIAN RESEARCHER KNOWS HIS NATIONAL CONTEXT VERY WELL, HE OFTEN LACKS KNOWLEDGE ON AN INTERNATIONAL SCALE. FOR EXAMPLE, ITS SOLUTION MAY BE VERY INTERESTING BUT THE LOCAL MARKET IS TOO SMALL TO BE ABLE TO MARKET IT

**FATMA TRABELSI,
COORDINATOR OF TRANSDAIRY IN TUNISIA**

These competitions were replicated in each of the 4 participating countries so in total it represents a good financial support.

FUNDS ARE GOOD, INTERNATIONAL EXCHANGES ARE EVEN BETTER

Tunisian researchers face financial constraints and a project such as TRANSDAIRY makes it possible to cover certain costs, but the real added value of such a project lies in its cross-border dimension. While Tunisian researchers know their national context very well, they often lack knowledge on an international scale. For example, their solution may be very interesting, but the local market is too small to be able to sell it.

This type of project also help to better understand international marketing standards, to benefit from training provided by international experts, to find complementarities through exchanges during brokerage events, to meet other researchers or entrepreneurs and to be able to benchmark. In short, to open up the researcher's world.

LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK AND FEASIBILITY: KEY ELEMENTS BEFORE EMBARKING ON A COOPERATION PROJECT IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

Thanks to Ms Trabelsi's experience in carrying out several cross-border cooperation projects, she shares part of her experience. First, she underlines that each country has its own context at the legislative level. As part of the TRANSDAIRY project, the coordinator is an Italian university which probably through that they could create cross-border spin-offs. The reality is quite different and until today, this type of creation is not yet possible. That's why it is so important that all partners are aware of what is feasible depending on the context of each country. She also recommends to reduce some administrative tasks to the coordinator.

Despite all this, the game is worth it. In a country which is increasingly suffering from a brain drain, seeing that 12 people from different research laboratories in Tunisia who participated in the activities of TRANSDAIRY were able to directly benefit from this support is a source of satisfaction.

SECTION FOUR

**TACKLING ALL
GENERATIONS:
FROM YOUTH
UNEMPLOYMENT
TO A MORE SOCIAL
MODEL OF CARE
FOR ELDERLY
PEOPLE**



Technical trainings are gaining value on the job market and women are key to support the Palestinian economy. Discover the insights from a Technical and Vocational Education Training institute in Palestine.

WORLD YOUTH SKILLS DAY: WHAT YOUNG PALESTINIANS NEED TO FIND A JOB

INTERVIEW WITH MR. ALA'A DARWISH FROM PALESTINE

HOW TO ADDRESS LABOUR MARKET'S NEEDS: A PALESTINIAN SUCCESS STORY

The story began about 20 years ago when some studies showed what the labour market really needed more technicians and skills directly applicable in technological and industrial sectors. With an investment of 30 million euros thanks to the German development bank, KFW, the Hisham Hijjawi College of Technology was born in Nablus. Today, 100 people work there and train about 1 200 students from all the surrounding governorates of the north part of the West Bank: the governorates of Jenin, Tulkarem, Qalqilya, Salfit, Tubas and of course Nablus.

The college offers 22 training programmes that cover a wide range of specialities: from administration and accounting to beautician and car mechanics. They even offer a training to become a land surveyor. For instance, the West Bank is divided into 3 areas: A, B and C. Area A is exclusively administered by the Palestinian National Authority; Area B is administered by both the Palestinian Authority and Israel; and

Area C, which contains the Israeli settlements, is administered by Israel. Some lands in area C are not registered and in order to do so, you need land surveyors. This is a clear example of how a training emerged from a labour market need.

INSIGHT OF A TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN THE WEST BANK

A Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), a term which appeared about 20 years ago too, is any form of education or training that provides knowledge and skills related to different economic sectors. It focuses much more on the practical side rather than the theoretical one. We could say that in a way it is the other side of education compared to universities studies.

Let's discover how the Hisham Hijjawi College of Technology works. First of all, it is purposely located in the east part of Nablus, close to the industrial area, to better respond to the needs of the companies and workshops located there with skilled young people who can immediately join them. The main objective of the college is to reach zero unemployment.



SOME YOUNG PALESTINIAN EVEN ADMIT THAT A 6-MONTH TRAINING IN A TVET IS MUCH MORE EFFECTIVE THAN A FULL UNIVERSITY DEGREE THAT TAKES ABOUT 5 YEARS TO COMPLETE

ALA'A DARWISH FROM HISHAM HIJJAWI TECHNOLOGY COLLEGE

And so far, it seems quite a success as all the students find a job right after completing their training. Having trainers who are employers helps a lot. And although the college is not an employment agency, the staff facilitate the contacts between Palestinian private companies and their students.

The college offers three types of degrees. The first one is the technical level certified by the ministry of education. The second one provides professional certificate or the so called semi-skilled: it is a one-year training and is certified by the ministry of labour. The third one can be either through short (3-6 months) and long training cycles (6 -12 months) which are certified by academies. There are no requirements of completing primary or secondary schools in the last case.

THE GREEN ECONOMY: A NEW SECTOR EMERGING IN PALESTINE

The Hisham Hijjawi College of Technology is the Palestinian partner of GREENLAND, an ENI CBC MED funded project. It aims at providing green skills to young people who are Not in Employment, Education or Training, the so called NEETs. While the college is

used to assess the skills required by the labour market, it is the first time that it conducted a study analysis focused on green skills in the framework of this project. In Palestine, most people who have heard of the green economy associate it to agriculture and not necessary to renewable energies, hybrid or electric cars. Besides gathering detailed data to identify green economy sectors with potential of recruitment, the college has the ability to negotiate with companies to offer the best option in order to respond to the needs.

**FROM ENGINEER TO TECHNICIAN:
A SOLUTION TO BETTER ADDRESS YOUTH
UNEMPLOYMENT IN PALESTINE**

In Palestine, most families wish to see their daughters and sons become engineers, medical doctors and lawyers. It is part of the social and cultural prestige, and it is not easy to change this mindset. However, the reality of today makes people start seeing the future in a different way. When we know that about 50% of universities students are still unemployed more than a year after graduating while students freshly graduated from a TVET immediately find a stable job, then the whole society start changing its mind about technicians and other professional jobs.





This is one of the aspects the college is working on through **raising awareness about the potential of professional careers through TVET trainings**. In other words, what they call **career change**. During the last years, the staff at the college has noticed a slow but tangible change. More and more universities graduates start thinking of this career change as a real opportunity to be able to move on in their lives. Some of them even admit that a 6-month training in a TVET is much more effective than a full university degree that takes about 5 years to complete.

THE FUTURE OF THE PALESTINIAN ECONOMY RELIES ON WOMEN

Many Palestinian men are highly attracted by the salaries that Israel companies offer, 2 to 3 times the average Palestinian salary. This is a real threat to the Palestinian economy. While men are attracted by this economic advantage despite the physical barriers of reaching the workplace, Palestinian women tend to prioritize other aspects in their lives such as their families and children. In this sense, the college also encourage women to take part in TVET trainings as they are going to work for Palestinian companies and not in Israel. To do so, **the college staff also meet with the student's parents to convince them of the advantages that their daughters can get by following such trainings**.

The last few years, the college has increased the number of women enrolled in TVET degrees and who benefitted from international grants. Those women have proven to be smart, efficient, and even more capable than male engineers when dealing with practical aspects such as the installation of photovoltaics panels.

LACK OF EQUIPMENT, SPACE AND HUMAN RESOURCES

While the college witnesses more interest from university students and women, it faces challenges in order to keep up with the broader regional labour market which also includes the Gulf countries. They lack investment to develop new curricula, resources to train professionals abroad to the latest techniques and even lack of space to enlarge some workshops such as carpentry.

With the covid-19 pandemic, as a TVET centre, the college adjusted as much as it could to limit the prejudice to the students, working longer hours per day and even on weekends to make sure each student gets the practical part. As most of the trainings represent about 30 % of theory and 70 % of practice, it is clearly much more costly to train students in TVET programmes than in universities. Knowing the reality of the Palestinian economy, the college can hardly rise the fees too.

LAST MESSAGE: CREATIVITY IS THE KEY

When asking Mr. Darwish about what message he would like to share with young Palestinians, he focused on the creativity part. He has been abroad and saw many examples of young entrepreneurs and still he believes that despite all the difficulties young Palestinian are facing, they have proven to be pioneers in some sectors, they have creative ideas that can be turned into successful businesses.

Creativity may be a key to success but for that you also need solid skills and institutional support to be able to thrive.



While COVID-19 hit the world and especially elderly people, TEC-MED project developed a care model based on a person-centred approach for the elderly and their caregivers.

A NEW CARE MODEL FOR AGEING MEDITERRANEAN PEOPLE: THE EXPERIENCE OF TEC-MED PROJECT

**INTERVIEW WITH MS. GUILIA COSTANZO TALARICO FROM SPAIN
AND MS. LEA EL KORH FROM LEBANON**

TEC-MED project is coming to its end, and we know little about the situation of dependent elderly people in the Mediterranean region. What is the situation about ageing population in the region? How is it being tackled? Discover the work carried out in the the framework of TEC-MED project to face this socio-demographic phenomenon and the challenges faced by partners from Spain, Italy, Greece, Tunisia, Lebanon, Egypt to implement new solution.

To answer these questions, ENI CBC MED programme has interviewed 2 women: Guilia Costanzo Talarico and Lea El Korh. Guilia is a sociologist and member of the coordination team of TEC-MED at the nursing department of the University of Seville (Spain), and the scientific manager of TEC-MED. Lea El Korh is a public health specialist with a focus on mental health and ageing at IDRAAC (Institute for Development, Research, Advocacy and Applied Care), a Lebanese NGO, partner in the project. She is one of the communication managers of TEC-MED too. Both

are very much involved in the implementation of TEC-MED and shared with passion the work they have developed during the last 3 years despite all the difficulties related to COVID-19 knowing that the bulk of the project is about dealing with elderly people.

AGEING POPULATION IN THE MEDITERRANEAN REGION

Ageing population is usually associated to Europe compared to North Africa and the Middle East (MENA) region which is characterized by a younger population. However, the MENA region is also facing the challenge of ageing population as health conditions have improved a lot during the last decades and people live longer. For example, Lebanon has the highest rate of elderly people among Arab countries. There is a big increase of people aged 65 and over. They currently represent about 11% of the population but are expected to reach 23.3 % of the population by 2050 explains Lea El Korh.



**PART OF THE RICHNESS OF TEC-MED PROJECT,
IS THE DIVERSITY OF THE 6 COUNTRIES THAT TOOK PART IN IT**

LEA EL KORH

Besides enjoying good medical services, this percentage could also be explained by the fact that more and more young Lebanese people are migrating especially since the end of 2019, when the socio-economic crisis increased sharply in the country, leaving older people with no choice than staying there.

Culturally speaking, it is much more common for elderly people to remain in their own homes or at their relatives' houses instead of living in a nursing home. The situation is similar in Egypt, Tunisia and even in Greece. While, in Spain and Italy, having their elderly in nursing homes is more frequent.

Economically speaking, Spain enjoys a high quality of public health services towards the elderly, and Italy enjoys a similar situation but with more privatisation. In Greece, there is not enough public services for the elderly and most of the people cannot afford private services for them. In Tunisia, Egypt and Lebanon, the situation is quite the same as there is no strong public service to guarantee a good pension. This is a quick overview of the Mediterranean countries in which TEC-MED worked.

Whether staying at home or living in a nursing home, elderly people - especially those who are dependent - need special attention. Unfortunately, **ageing population is a public concern but not a priority** reminds Giulia.

**TEC-MED: A SOCIAL CARE MODEL FOR
ELDERLY PEOPLE TO PUT THE HUMAN
AT THE CENTRE**

With the increase of life expectancy worldwide, people live more but what people really want is not only to live more but to live better. TEC-MED wanted to respond to this need. The project focused on people aged 60 and more with cognitive and physical dependencies. Obviously, it is not the same suffering from one pathology or multiple pathologies, having 60 years old or 90, living at home or being in a nursing home especially when it comes to autonomy.

People with dependencies need help and support to wash, put their clothes on, cook, eat, etc. When

it comes to elderly people in nursing homes, they often cannot choose the life they want. It can be as simple as what they want to eat today or what kind of cultural activities they wish to do.

Considering all these parameters and developing a simple questionnaire to address all these aspects, TEC-MED partners started spending time with elderly people and interviewed them to better assess their needs and provide them with tips that can improve their quality of life.

These recommendations could be related to eating habits, exercising, available services nearby, relaxation techniques, places where they can gather and socialise in their neighbourhoods, etc. Most of them enjoyed these interviews and welcomed all the information provided as they have nothing to lose. By developing this methodology, TEC-MED demonstrated that

**MAIN CHALLENGES TO IMPLEMENT A
MODEL FOR THE ELDERLY PEOPLE
AND THEIR CAREGIVERS**

Giulia and Lea sum up the main difficulties they faced to implement the projects' activities.

First of all, it was hard to explain to elderly people what TEC-MED wanted to develop (a new care model based on social, cultural and ethical factors). Many of them would say "What are you selling" when TEC-MED partners were approaching them.

Secondly, they realised that training the training agents who would conduct the interviews with the elderly people was not an easy task.

Trainers were not only expected to receive inputs but also to contribute in developing the model.



**LET THEM DECIDE ABOUT SOME PARTS OF THEIR LIVES
AND NOT TREAT THEM LIKE PRISONERS**

GIULIA COSTANZO TALARICO

another care is possible based on social and cultural factors, not only through financial support and access to nursing homes.

Once the methodology was developed, people were trained to use it, to test it in the 6 participating countries and finally certify it. A new care model based on a person-centred approach was born.

Moreover, applying this care model allowed the partners to better identify some weaknesses.

First, there is a lack of interest from policy makers. Second, there is a lack of listening to the needs of older people and third there is a lack of proactiveness. TEC-MED partners realised how much elderly people wanted to be empowered with knowledge and skills. They want to have an active role. TEC-MED shed light on the importance of caring. When people feel listened to, they feel better and this improves their quality of life. And here is the point, when it comes to convince policy makers, it is always much more difficult to show the qualitative added value versus the quantitative data.

There must be a personal implication when you get involved as a training agent adds Giulia.

Thirdly, they face a real digital gap when they developed the e-platform in 6 languages to be used by the training agents and the elderly.

Finally, it was not always easy to deal with the expectations of the elderly. Some were grateful and were waiting for the visits of the training agents while others had very high expectations that could not be met.

**INCREASE QUALITY OF LIFE AND A GREAT
INVESTMENT FOR PUBLIC HEALTH POLICIES**

All the challenges faced are worth it as this new care model proves to increase the quality of life of elderly people. Now, TEC-MED partners have to convince their policy makers on the importance to invest in such a model to decrease spending on public health services. Sometimes, small changes can make a big difference.

SECTION FIVE

#WOMED: STORIES OF MEDITERRANEAN WOMEN'S RESILIENCE IN CHALLENGING ENVIRONMENTS

On the occasion of the 2022 International Women's Day (8 March), we published a series of 7 portraits highlighting stories of women who have succeeded in breaking the bias in their own community also through their participation in ENI CBC Med funded projects. Whether they live in Europe or in the Middle East, whether they are fond of sports or work with vulnerable people, whether they are starting their career or are seniors in their jobs, they all have an incredible story to tell.



“In the Gaza society where most women do not work outside their homes, being the head of a regional NGO supervising a team of 4 men is uncommon” says Aisha Salem.

BEING THE DIRECTOR OF AN NGO IN GAZA: HOW AISHA SALEM BREAKS THE BARRIERS IN A CHALLENGING SOCIETY FOR WOMEN

The world is full of contrasts but there are some areas in the world where the concentration of contrasts is even higher and its consequences in the quality of life of women are even more tangible. Gaza strip seems to be one of those places.

Gaza strip, 42 km long and 6 to 12 km wide with a population of 2 million, is not only the 3rd most densely populated area in the world, but also densely filled with contrasts. Gaza strip is divided into 5 governorates (North, Centre, Rafah, Khan Younes and Gaza) and you can perceive huge differences in such a small place whether you live in

a rural or urban area, whether your family members went to the university or did not get the chance to go to school.

In a place where women still need the legal permission of their husband to travel, where women can't go outside their village fearing men's reaction, where women do not dare to uncover their faces in front of a stranger (someone outside their family or community), where it is unthinkable for girls to mix with boys in public primary schools, being the director of an NGO and responsible of a male team is courageous and uncommon.



WE SOMEHOW BROKE THIS STEREOTYPE OF WOMEN IN RURAL AREAS WHO DO NOT GO OUTSIDE THEIR HOME TO WORK

AISHA SALEM, ABOUT OPENING A KITCHEN FOR THE WIVES OF GAZA FISHERMEN TO INCREASE THEIR INCOME BY COOKING DISHES AND SELLING THEM

This is the case of Aisha Salem, 33 years old and mother of 2 daughters. She is from Gaza. She has a university degree and have been working for the last 11 years for the Palestinian NGO, the Economic and Social Development Centre of Palestine (ESDC), based in Ramallah but with an office in Gaza. This NGO provides services to marginalised communities especially in rural areas. She started as an administrative assistance and she is now head of ESDC office in Gaza. She is also the representative of FISH MED NET project as ESDC is the Palestinian partner.

Her work requires field visits and sometimes travels abroad. Legally, she needs the permission of her husband to do this. Thanks to her husband and family who are open-minded, this is not a constraint for her. Women traveling for work in the Gaza society is not something common. This is probably the first stereotypes she breaks. When she became the director of the Gaza office, she started supervising a team of 4 men engineers, breaking another stereotype and the list of the stereotypes she breaks is long.

Let's focus on the work she does with fishermen. In Gaza, fishermen are considered a closed community. They wake up very early, go to the sea, fish, come back, sleep and go fishing again. They interact much more with the sea than with people. As far as Aisha remembers, she only met 2 fisherwomen, but they stopped fishing as soon as they got married. As for

women working in the fishing sector, she can easily count them: maximum 10. They are either the wives or the mothers of some fishermen selling fishes in the beach.

To reach Gaza fishermen, she first needs to inform about her visit to the union of fishermen, which is located in a remote area. For her first visit, she did not feel comfortable to go alone so she asked one of her men's colleagues to go with her. Little by little, fishermen got to know her and got used of her visits so now she goes alone.

One of her first meeting with them was to expose the idea of increasing their incomes through the participation of their wives by opening a kitchen where their wives would cook and sell the dishes. Their first reaction was a strong no. No way for our wives to work outside their homes.

How come men still refuse women to work knowing that unemployment rate in Gaza is so high and the economic crisis is so harsh. Because the unemployment rate is so high, men are at home, jobless and there are not enough job opportunities for all, so they prioritize men working outside, according to Aisha.

In rural areas, women "participate" in the work within the family framework and without getting a salary. For instance, this is quite frequent for cattle farming.



Back to Gaza fishermen, Aisha gathered with them again and again and she finally convinced them to open this kitchen project for their wives. That was an achievement and breaking another barrier.

As Aisha works for marginalised communities in rural areas, she also has to pay attention how she dresses. Aisha wears the veil but do not cover her face. Sometimes, depending on the people she will meet, she would rather wear the jilbab, a long and loose-fit coat that covers her entirely.

BREAKING THE FEAR

In a society where men control every single aspect of women's lives, breaking the fear is probably the most important first step to do. Then, women can move on little by little, learn, gain confidence, believe in themselves, in their potential and their power, start to be independent, in the way of thinking and financially speaking. In Gaza, it is still a long journey, but at least the journey has started with women like Aisha.



THE ECONOMIC SITUATION IN GAZA IS BAD AND UNEMPLOYMENT RATE IS HIGH. PEOPLE THERE THINK: MEN ARE AT HOME SO IF THERE ARE JOBS, THE PRIORITY SHOULD BE FOR THEM AND WOMEN SHOULD STAY HOME

AISHA SALEM



A product designer by training, Federica highlights that women face more challenges than men in technical professions.

“MEN SHOULD PUT THEMSELVES IN OUR SHOES AND START THINKING WHY WOMEN SHOULD DO EXTRA WORK TO INCREASE THEIR CREDIBILITY”: FEDERICA DITTA, ITALY

Federica Ditta is an Italian woman, a product designer who graduated from the University of Palermo in industrial design back in 2016. She is 28 years old and has set up a start-up called Risacca with 2 male partners, thanks to the financial support of GIMED, an ENI CBC Med funded project.

Until she graduated, she has never felt any discrimination for being a woman, but things began to change when she started working. Her first experience was in a company, at the Research and Development department where she was the only woman. She was designing prototypes and producing them with 3D printings. After some time, she quit this job, started working by herself on product design and circular economy and moved back to her hometown, Mazara del Vallo, in Sicily.

Risacca aims at reusing and recycling waste and turn it into a new product. For instance, she works with fishermen who don't know how to get rid of

their used fishing nets, partly because of a lack of regulation on how to dispose this type of waste and also because it is costly to get rid of them. She collects those unused fishing nets and turn them into fashionable bags ('Sacca' means bag in Italian, this is where the name of the company comes from).

SUBTLE DISCRIMINATION AND LACK OF CREDIBILITY

Federica perfectly described the type of discrimination she experiences; it is an insidious discrimination. In Italy, she says, there is no written law forbidding women of doing certain jobs, but men make you feel that as a woman, you are not good enough to do some specific jobs. How many times did she attend fairs in industrial design and people would tell her they want to talk to the technician and how surprise they are when they realise that she is the technician.



IN ITALY WE DON'T HAVE ANY LAW THAT SAYS WOMEN CANNOT DO SOMETHING OR GO ANYWHERE BUT, IN THIS CASE, DISCRIMINATION IS INSIDIOUS

FEDERICA DITTA

This also happens when she goes to the hardware store and asks for specific equipment or when she had to buy some machineries. Men would gently adapt the language so that she can understand the details of the machineries and again will be astonished to see that she can perfectly speak their language as she had already worked with this type of machineries. Most of the time, men do not realise that they are discriminating.

**INCREASE THE CREDIBILITY TO
BREAK SOME BARRIERS**

Federica is young and so are her two partners in Risacca. Being selected and winning the sub-grant from GIMED project helped them a lot in gaining more credibility in front of investors and more experienced entrepreneurs. This credibility that you so badly needed when you are young and a woman to prove yourself.

**AND NOW, WHAT'S NEXT TO REMOVE
THESE BARRIERS?**

Girls need more examples of women surrounding them who are engineers, scientists, politicians. If they lack references like that, how can they imagine themselves working in these areas?

But women also need to talk to men, explain to them so that they realise what girls are experiencing as they are not fully aware of these discriminations. Federica realised she was facing obstacles when she started following some girls on Instagram who would share their experiences and would recognise herself in these examples. It takes some time to Federica to realise that, so how can we expect men to understand it if they don't put our dresses. Privilege is not something you can see but it deletes obstacles in reaching your goals. If men picture themselves with no privilege, they may better understand women who have to face these unjustified inequalities.



LITTLE GIRLS HAVE NO REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN WHO COULD BE POWERFUL FIGURES LIKE A WOMAN POLITICIAN OR ENGINEER

FEDERICA DITTA



“Breaking a stereotype is demonstrating that you can work in a male dominated sector not only in offices but also in the field” says Amira Shawky.

QUALITY IN EDUCATION AND WORKING HARD MAKE THE DIFFERENCE TO REACH MANAGEMENT POSITIONS: AMIRA SHAWKY, EGYPT

SINCE THE BEGINNING, AMIRA WAS LOOKING FOR CHALLENGE

Amira Shawky is a 47-year-old Egyptian woman. She is the CEO of L.I.O.N.S (Logistics International Outsourcing Networking Services) in the city of Alexandria. She is a member of the administrative board of the international transport and logistics department of the Chamber of Commerce of Alexandria and head of the training and traineeship department. She is a lecturer at the Arab Academy for Science, Technology and Maritime Transport and also a consultant for a number of companies. She has been working in this field for 26 years. She studied accounting and started her career in a bank. She soon found out that she needed something more challenging in her professional life. She saw that most of the people working in the sector of international transport and logistics were men and she thought, why not trying so she moved to this sector.

Her second challenge was to be more prepared to work in this field, so she studied hard and got a diploma and then a master's degree in marketing and freight forwarding. She received the best mark. She is about to finish her PhD in supply chain and marketing. She believes in skills and quality of education in order to climb the ladder of success. In her company, there are 8 women and 4 men.

WORKING IN THE FIELD IS PROBABLY THE MOST STRIKING STEREOTYPE SHE BREAKS

In the logistics sector, there are both office tasks and field work. A woman doing office tasks is totally fine but starting to go to the port and follow up the operations is breaking a stereotype in Egypt. In the port, there is an internal regulation not allowing women to enter the port facilities after 5 p.m. for security reasons.

Ports are usually located in remoted areas and therefore it is not safe for women, Amira says. Once, she had to go to an electrical station located in Aswan (in the south of Egypt, in a remote and desert area) and she could not go alone as this is not accepted by the Egyptian society. Her father came with her so she could do the work.

WHAT HAS CHANGED IN A GENERATION?

Compared to 25 years ago, there are more and more sectors opened to women and women holding management positions in Egypt. Girls nowadays seem hungrier for success. They want to be someone and not anyone.



WE ARE ALL HUMANS, REGARDLESS OF GENDER

AMIRA SHAWKY

Twice, Amira emphasized on the fact that above all we are human regardless our gender and this should not prevent us from doing our jobs. What matters is the will of the person to develop his/her work and life. However, she also believes that women cannot do all types of work such as dockers which require more physical strength while women are more patient and multitasking, two qualities highly appreciated in this sector. To reach management position, she believes that we should work smart and not work based on the strength.

THE AGE IS A BARRIER

When asking her about the barriers she had to face during her career, she remembers the fact of being young at the beginning would make her life harder as men colleagues would not take her seriously. She also experienced this when she became the head of a team whose members were older than her.

ANGELA MERKEL IS A ROLE MODEL

Amira sees in Angela Merkel a model in the way she led Germany and influenced the EU and the world. She never took advantage of her position and everything she achieved was thanks to her efforts and hardworking. Her actions are much bigger than her words.

THE YEP MED PROJECT AND HOW SHE SETS AN EXAMPLE FOR THE NEW GENERATION

Amira is involved in the YEP MED project which deals with youth employment. This project trains young people in the international trade and logistics in the port sector. The project works with port authorities, training centres and companies of this sector. Amira represents a real example of success for young women who want to start their career in this field.



“I am the only woman where I live and where I work. In the African mentality, this is not common” says Karidja Diabate.

WITH DETERMINATION AND AGAINST ALL ODDS, THE JOURNEY OF A MIGRANT WHO HELPS OTHER MIGRANTS IN SICILY: KARIDJA DIABATE, IVORY COAST

Karidja Diabate is a 36-year-old woman from Ivory Coast and mother of a 5-year-old daughter. She arrived in Sicily in 2017. Since then, she has been living in Palermo where she discovered her vocation: to become a social worker. Thanks to several projects and trainings, in particular a sub-project financed by MoreThanAJob, The Game, for the socio-professional integration of migrants, she currently works as a cultural and linguistic mediator to support migrants in their various administrative procedures, job search, etc.

At first glance, one might think that becoming a social worker in Italy is not a big deal, but for a foreigner like Karidja it is more like an uphill battle. First, she had to learn Italian, then she had to have her Ivorian diploma recognized. She had to pass competitive exams to be able to enter a public university. After two attempts, she enrolled in a private school. After all this, she had to deal with the reactions of people around her. Most foreign people do not understand Karidja's stubbornness to obtain a diploma. For them, it's a waste of time. She would better go to work.



**I MUST SAY THAT WITHOUT LEARNING THE LANGUAGE,
THE COURAGE, THE WILL AND THE MOTIVATION,
WE CANNOT TALK OF INTEGRATION**

KARIDJA DIABATE

After 5 years in Italy, she notices a significant lack of foreign women in the labour market. Is it due to lack of integration, lack of will and motivation? The reasons are many and complex. Anyway, what defines Karidja is her strength of will and her determination to overcome obstacles. For instance, having her daughter's passport made without the authorization of her father, who did not recognize her, was one of the obstacles she had to face. The case reached the juvenile court and after many difficulties, she won the battle.

She likes to define herself as a woman-boy because she assumes the role of father and mother. In the African mentality, being a free and determined woman is not taken for granted and she knows

what she is talking about. She paid the high price to be able to acquire this independence. In the community where she lives, she is the only woman. At work, she is also the only woman. It does not matter. That's not going to stop her. Her recipe is made up of a big dose of willpower, motivation, a taste for learning and being proactive.

Karidja is a free woman, she does not put any constraints on herself: if the wind takes her somewhere else or brings her back to Ivory Coast, why not. So far, she is satisfied with her life path. What is important for her now is to work in the social sector, be a good listener with others at work, and move forward. As for the rest, the future will tell.





“Since the beginning, my university degree has been my best asset to develop my career at the Ministry of Local Administration” says Farah Dawoud.

DIPLOMA AND SKILLS, DRIVERS TO BREAK THE STEREOTYPE OF A WOMAN HOLDING WASTE MANAGEMENT POSITION: FARAH DAWOUD, JORDAN

Farah Dawoud is the head of Landfills and Transfer Stations division in the Solid Waste Management Department at the Jordanian Ministry of Local Administration. She studied civil engineering and then did a master in renewable energies. She is also the contact person at the Ministry for REUSEMED project.

Nowadays, in most Arab countries, girls studying STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) is quite common. The gap arises when these women 'armed' with their university degrees want to enter the labour market. Getting married and having children is probably one of the main barriers for them to reach interesting job positions or aspire to develop their career.

Farah also draws the attention that not all engineer specialities face the same problem. A chemical or industrial engineer means a lot of office work while civil, mechanical, or electrical engineers' jobs involve more work in the field, therefore there are more men in these sectors. So how did Farah manage to reach this position as responsible of landfills at the Ministry, visiting landfills in remote municipalities in Jordan until late hours?

But first, let's think what makes the Jordanian society accepts more and more that women work in positions that were usually held by men until 10 years ago?

INTERNATIONAL DONORS AND ECONOMIC CRISIS PUSH THE SOCIETY TOWARDS MORE GENDER BALANCE AT WORK

In 10 years, Jordan witnessed the arrival of 1.3 million Syrians in its territory for a population of 10 million. International donors started implementing programmes to support the Jordanian government in integrating Syrians refugees. In each programme, there is a "woman empowerment" component as Farah explains when mentioning the "Cash for works programmes". This term refers to employment programmes that offer refugees and local population an opportunity to earn money. Through these programmes, women started to be trained in jobs usually associated to men such as electricians, plumbers, etc.

The economic crises added a component to the "break the bias" as the cost of living rose a lot in Jordan so there is no other choice than counting on a second salary to pay the bills.



**HOW CAN A WOMAN BE HEAD OF LANDFILLS, THIS IS SOMETHING
REALLY STRANGE IN THE JORDANIAN SOCIETY**

FARAH DAWOUD

**HARDWORKING AND UPDATING SKILLS ARE
KEY ELEMENTS**

In the case of Farah, working hard over the last 12 years at the ministry built her reputation and make her known for her skills. She also decided to start a master degree in renewable energy, a new speciality in Jordan as part of her will to enlarge her competences and be aligned with the world's challenges of today: climate change and green economy.

Towards the end of 2017, when the Ministry decided to create the division of solid waste management and decision makers knew that Farah was doing this master degree which is aligned with the priorities of the Ministry and knowing how she works, they decided to appoint her as head of landfills and transfer stations.

WOMAN AND HEAD OF LANDFILLS?

When people think of jobs in waste management, they usually picture people collecting waste and trucks bringing it to landfills. They don't think that

this kind of jobs requires technical and scientific skills, planning in order to have healthy and working infrastructures. It also requires getting citizens involved, organising raising awareness campaigns. That's what Farah tries to explain to break the idea that people associate to waste management. She faces more challenges in dealing with long procedures and lack of technical skills than discrimination at work or lack of respect.

**FROM RECYCLE TO REUSE: BREAK THE
STEREOTYPE AGAIN**

In the framework of REUSEMED, Farah is so glad to promote the culture of reuse. She is proud of the women of Deir Alla Municipality, north of Jordan (one of the participating regions in the project) as they are already quite aware and organised in order to implement the circuits of reuse, identifying collecting points, organising the repairing and the places where end users can reuse these products. She sincerely hopes that this experience can be replicated in more municipalities across the country and change the behaviour of today consumers' society.





**With her NGO
'Palestine Sports For Life',
Tamara strives to empower
girls and young women
through sports.**

THE POWER OF SPORTS TO EMPOWER GIRLS: TAMARA AWARTANI, PALESTINE

IN PALESTINE, SHE SETS AN EXAMPLE

Tamara Awartani, born and raised in Ramallah, Palestine, passionate about sport, is the co-founder and director of the NGO 'Palestine Sports For Life' (PS4L), partner of Skills4Sports.

Since her childhood, she is used to be one of the few girls taking part in different sports activities. For example, she was one of eight female swimmers all over Palestine, one of five female karate athletes. She represented Palestine as the only female under 14 basketball coach at the Children of the World Camp parallel to the FIBA (International Basketball Federation) world cup in Türkiye back in 2010 but most importantly she was the only female basketball coach for young boys in her country. This is just to state some of her roles.

In 2000, she moved to Jordan to study at the University. Besides her studies, she played basketball in different teams, became a member of the Jordanian national basketball team and took part in many Arab tournaments. She even played as a professional basketball player during one season in Germany. During this period, she learnt a lot from and off the court, and realised how sport contributes to build a supporting system and to have a second family.

With a bachelor's degree in information technology and a master's degree in business administration, she decided to go back to Palestine with the strong will of giving back to her community what she has learned during those years.

Thanks to her family and husband support, her passion for sports and her perseverance, she stands today as the only one in Palestine to be an academic specialised in sports for development and being globally recognized. She sets an example in continuing her career of managing the NGO, continuing her PhD and having a family with 3 children, who are always by her side supporting her.

LIMITED INFRASTRUCTURES AND SAFE SPACES FOR GIRLS TO PRACTICE SPORTS

One of the main challenges for girls to practice sports in Palestine is the lack of safe places. In Palestine, girls cannot just go to the pitch or to the street to play football or any sport. Culture and traditions prevent them to mix with boys and exercise in the very few infrastructures that exist. Things become more critical between 16 and 18 years old. Sports become less of importance in their lives due to cultural limitations and expected next steps such as marriage.



I WAS THE ONLY FEMALE BASKETBALL COACH FOR YOUNG BOYS IN PALESTINE

TAMARA AWARTANI

BIG CHANGES IN PALESTINE OVER THE LAST 14 YEARS

Tamara is proud to talk about being the first female basketball coach for young boys in 2008. She started with five boys in the first session and next session she had +30 boys who wanted to be in her session: eventually, she trained +200 boys in her coaching journey.

This is a big change in people's and institutions mindset towards female coaches. Tamara sets an example, she trained other girls to be coaches to increase the role models in the Palestinian society. Building their capacity in using sports as a tool for social change and development, raising the awareness about the importance of having safe spaces, has contributed to this change. Before, one of the rare options for girls to access to safe infrastructures was to be a member of a private club.

Now, there are more multipurpose sports halls (but still not enough) and gyms, and most importantly the mindset towards the importance of sports in their lives is shifting positively. There are only five public indoor sports halls across Palestine.

**SPORT IS NOT ABOUT COMPETITION; IT IS
PART OF YOUR DAILY LIFE AND CAN BE A JOB
OPPORTUNITY**

In Palestine, most of the people see sports as a hobby or as something reserved to champions, as a competition and not as part of your daily life that enables you to grow personally and acquire important life skills in addition to contributing to the economy.

Now, one of the challenges that Tamara faces is raising awareness on how sports can provide different job opportunities in a country where 35

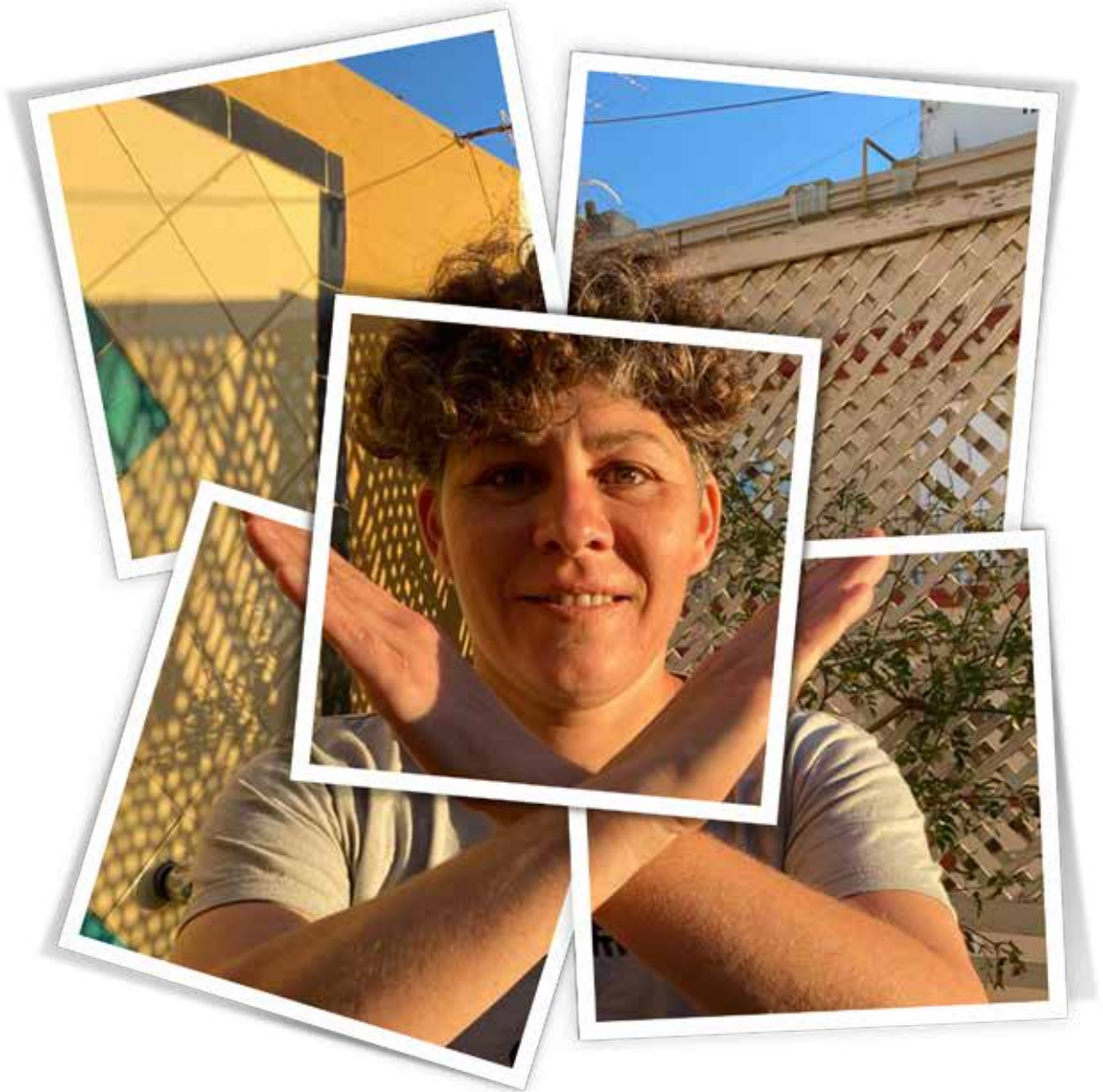




% of its people are NEETS (Not in Employment, Education or Training). Through Skills4Sports project, she will empower girls and youth who studied sports to train them with emerging skills such as in sports management, sports technology, and more so that they are better prepared to fulfil the skills that employers are looking for in the sports industry both in Palestine and abroad. Tamara decided to focus her efforts in providing programs through PS4L to empower girls and

young women, and providing spaces where the parents would feel safe to leave their daughters so that they can practice sports. She worked with the support of the Ministry of Education to open schools after schools' hours to ensure safe spaces to practice sports by trained young women coaches from the same communities. By doing this, she brought a solution to the limited infrastructures that prevent some young girls to play sports in safe spaces.





Davinia's story of empowerment is a living proof of how the Spanish society has significantly evolved toward gender equality.

BELIEVE IN YOURSELF AND MAKE SURE YOU ARE NOT ALONE IN THIS STRUGGLE: DAVINIA GONZÁLEZ, SPAIN

Davinia González is a 41-year-old woman from Valencia, Spain. She was the first woman football coach for boys in the city of Valencia in a time where this was still a taboo and she is an entrepreneur in a sector dominated by men: gardening. Now, she defines herself as an active feminist. She is a beneficiary of InnovAgroWoMed project funded by ENI CBC Med Programme.

CHILDHOOD: A GIRL PLAYING FOOTBALL IN A SEXIST SOCIETY

Since she was a little girl, Davinia did not want to wear skirts, put make up and play rhythmic gymnastics. She broke her first and most difficult stereotype when she was 11 years old and told her family that she wanted to play football. In the early 1990s, that was not common in Spain. During many years, she would play only with boys' teams as there was no girl football team and her uncles were totally against her playing football. Thanks to her determination and to the support of her grandmother, an outstanding woman who dared

divorcing in a time where couples would not do that, she managed to follow one of her dreams.

ADULTHOOD: WOMAN FOOTBALL COACH AND ENTREPRENEUR IN THE GARDENING SECTOR

Between 1999 and 2007, she became the first woman football coach in the city of Valencia. She remembers this period as a tough one as she suffered a lot of verbal attacks and sexism.

Together with another woman football coach, in each game, they would listen to comments such as: go home and do the cleaning, why can't you train only girls or coach basketball as this is more feminine. She had problems with referees and above all with other men coaches from other teams. They would hate her winning which would fuel their frustration of a woman winning over them. She has always worn her hair short. She would even listen to guys insinuating that it is a man disguised in a woman. She was about to go on trial with the football federation because of these repeated verbal attacks.



IN 2005, IN THE CITY OF VALENCIA, IT WAS COMMON TO HEAR DURING A FOOTBALL GAME, COMMENTS DIRECTED TO ME AND MY COLLEAGUE AS WOMEN COACHES: GO HOME AND DO THE CLEANING

DAVINIA GONZÁLEZ

On the professional level, she is an entrepreneur in the gardening sector, a male-dominated business. According to her, 90% of the staff in gardening businesses are men. The 10 % of women working there would do tasks that required more accuracy and details such as arranging the flowers. Most of the gardening work requires physical strength, working with heavy machineries, using hoe, pruning, digging.

During her training in a TVET (Technical and Vocational Education and Training), there were only 3 women out of 23 students. Her project is to convert urban grey spaces into green by offering gardening services.

I AM AN ACTIVE FEMINIST

In the early 2000s, it was a difficult time for Davinia but it was also a turning point for her as she recalls the big demonstrations. She started taking part in the 8th March to celebrate Women's Day. She says that they started to be more aware of them as women, their potential, their will to get more freedoms. The movement generated around the 8th March (in Spanish we refer to it as 8M), gave them strength and help them overcome their fears. The emancipation was on the right track. Media started covering more news on gender issues and laws followed to guarantee more gender equality in the Spanish society.





**ABOVE ALL, STAY AND DON'T GIVE UP.
THIS IS THE MAIN THING WE DID DESPITE ALL THE DIFFICULTIES**

DAVINIA GONZÁLEZ

**SOLIDARITY AMONG WOMEN AND
LOVE YOURSELF**

What helped Davinia not to stop this fight, remain and don't give up as she says, is being part of a group of women who take care of each other. Being together and part of a group bring you strength and support. One of these examples is what she experienced lately, being part of this group of 35 women through InnovAgroWoMed project. It helped her directly through the training she received in order to start her business in gardening and also helped her a lot indirectly by being part of a group of women, all seeking a project in a challenging sector and sharing together their concerns, hope and motivations. But what if you are alone in this fight: then, you have to love yourself, believe in yourself and want your freedom.

**CONCILIATION OF WORK-PERSONAL AND
FAMILY LIFE AND MORE FEMINIST MEN**

Davinia thinks that we need more laws to reconcile work and family life so that women divide the care work with men, have more time for them and think about their personal projects.

Many men remain in their comfortable situation, don't want to renounce to their privileges but there are also more and more men who are supportive, and we should make them more visible so that they become examples. Obviously, this should be tackled through education from the earliest age. Looking back 20 years ago and see how the Spanish society evolved regarding gender equality, we should be very proud of what Davinia has achieved and how more and more stereotypes are being broken.



To succeed professionally in certain sectors, willpower, hard work and family support are not enough. What is also needed is a mindset change at society level.

THE LADIES OF THE CONSTRUCTION SECTOR: ROUA AND OUMAYA, TWO MEDITERRANEAN WOMEN COMMITTED TO AN ECOLOGICAL TRANSITION OF THE SECTOR

On International Women's Day 2023, ENI CBC MED program took the time to chat with two women involved in the RE-MED project. The latter aims to transform construction and demolition waste into new resources for road construction and maintenance. Although the road and construction sectors are largely dominated by men, two women have made their way there.

Roua Zarrouk is a civil engineer in Tunisia. She is head of pavement services at the Center for Testing and Construction Techniques (CETEC) and head of the "pavement mechanics" section. Oumaya Marzouk has a researcher profile and works in France.

After completing a university degree in chemistry in Tunisia, she pursued her studies in France. She is currently project director in circular economy at the Center for Studies and Expertise on Risks, Environment, Mobility and Planning (CEREMA) and has been recognized as a national expert by the French government in the field of recycling in road infrastructures.

Both have brilliant backgrounds. They have the support of their family and have been lucky enough to be able to access interesting positions in a largely male dominated sector, facing many challenges but with pride and satisfaction.

CHALLENGES: A DRIVING FORCE OR A BRAKE TO GET WHERE THEY ARE?

The sad reality is that most women who grow up or who live in the southern shore of the Mediterranean have assumed that they have to work twice to three times more than men to be recognized and accepted in certain professional sectors.

Mrs. Markzouk and Ms. Zarrouk share some anecdotes they have experienced.

During a job interview when she hears, after having perfectly answered all the technical and psychotechnical questions: but you are a woman, you are not going to work in the south of Tunisia! Or when a future colleague refuses to be managed by a woman.



BEING COMPETENT IS NOT ENOUGH TO GAIN CREDIBILITY

OUMAYA MARZOUK

When a colleague says to you: go get a broom, what are you doing here or when a university professor is surprised that her student wants to pursue her studies and start a PhD degree, as if she won't be able to make it, these women can either give up or be boosted by this kind of challenge and demonstrate that they are perfectly capable of it.

There is no doubt that they can. Women can acquire knowledge and skills, but it does not seem enough to be credible and to access to senior management positions. And unfortunately, it does not matter if you are in France or in Tunisia because in this specific sector, mindsets do not evolve much.

TIME AND RELATIONSHIPS TO GAIN MORE CREDIBILITY

“With time, we learn to respect you for your skills and your way of doing things. We forget that you are a woman, and we see you as a professional,” said Ms. Zarrouk. As for Mrs. Marzouk, it is the social aspect of relationships between colleagues that allowed her to be better accepted.

ARE FEMALE ROLE MODELS REALLY USEFUL?

In their case, it could help but it is not essential. Ms. Zarrouk has her father as a model. For Mrs. Marzouk, she had none, even if she recognizes that the support of her supervisor in her various professional stages has been of great support to her.

WHAT ABOUT THE LAWS ON GENDER EQUALITY?

In order to accelerate the participation of women in economic and professional life, the “Rixain” law of 24th December 2021 in France includes several measures aimed at greater equality between women and men in companies. In this context, article 14 establishes an obligation of balanced representation between women and men in the management positions of large companies.

According to Mrs. Marzouk, if these kinds of laws are perceived as an incentive, why not. That said, these laws prove that there is a failure in the evolution of mindset. If the society naturally progressed towards more gender equality, we wouldn't need it. Let's say that these laws contribute to accelerating the process towards more parity.

As for Ms. Zarrouk, wanting to guarantee parity through laws is not necessarily the right method. She would be more in favour of measures such as anonymous CVs rather than a quota system.

WHAT ABOUT FEMININITY IN THE BUILDING AND PUBLIC WORKS SECTOR?

Both agree on the fact that it is important not to try to look like a man to assume certain positions. It is not because they work in a sector largely represented by men that they have to give up their femininity.



ALWAYS GO FURTHER, PERSEVERE WHILE YOU SHUT YOUR EARS

ROUA ZARROUK

“We have to act like women, and they have to accept us as we are,” adds Ms. Zarrouk.

“The older generation thought that you had to dress like a man to be more respected: pants and dark colors. I often dress in colorful skirts and wear heels,” says Mrs. Marzouk.

THE WEIGHT OF SOCIETY

The weight of society should not be underestimated, especially in the southern shore of the Mediterranean. All women are not lucky enough to count on family support (both moral and financial), and unfortunately, willpower and lots of hard work are not always enough to succeed.

In the case of Tunisia and probably in other countries of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, when a family does not have the means to meet its needs, girls are the first ones to be taken out of school so that they go and work. In some cases, the priority of education is given to boys.

When you grow up in the capital and go to more remote regions, you become more aware of the disparities, the differences as if we had changed countries.

It is a cultural shock. There is an obvious huge gap between the north and the south of Tunisia and even between those who studied abroad and those

who remained in the country. These differences are reflected in the way you interact between men and women and later on, in the way you raise your children” says Mrs. Marzouk.

TO CONCLUDE: PROMOTE DIVERSITY AND PARTICIPATE IN COMMUNITY LIFE

Changing mentalities is probably the most difficult element when addressing gender equality and education and family support are important but not enough.

Promoting the diversity from an early age in the sense of mixing girls and boys, in different types of activities (school, sport, theatre, etc.) is a key element. Participating in community life also plays an important role. In the case of Ms. Zarrouk, it was decisive.

Thanks to volunteering and her involvement in an association, she found a place where she can meet different kind of people and exchange ideas with them, she discovered the art of debating, she found a space to speak freely, to gain more self-confidence. The association has become a second family where she learnt a lot.

What is more important than getting to know and respect each other to be accepted regardless of the environment or sector in which one wants to develop and grow professionally.



On International Women’s Day 2024 (8 March), Interreg NEXT MED highlighted women’s integration into the labour market in Algeria and Türkiye through interviews with Ms. Nadia Kaassis and Ms. Şebnem Sözer, representing the two new member countries. These discussions offer insights into the challenges and advancements in gender equality in the workplace within these nations.

EMPOWERING WOMEN IN THE MEDITERRANEAN: INSIGHTS FROM ALGERIA AND TÜRKIYE ON INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

INTERVIEW WITH MS. NADIA KAASSIS FROM ALGERIA AND MS. ŞEBNEM SÖZER FROM TÜRKIYE

As Algeria and Türkiye has joined Interreg NEXT MED Programme, we seize the opportunity to introduce our representatives from the national authority of these 2 countries to get to know them, their experience, their expectations regarding the contribution of the programme to advance on women integration in the labour market. For instance, Algeria guarantees equal pay to women and men for the same job. While Türkiye shows a high percentage of women participation in the job market. In such a cooperation programme, we always learn from each other's experiences.

Ms. Kaassis, you are the National Contact Point (NCP) of Algeria for the Interreg NEXT MED Programme and you work at the National Center for Studies and Analysis for Population and Development (CENEAPED). Could you briefly explain your professional background and your position within the CENEAPED?

I am Nadia Kaassis, with a degree in economics and a Specialized Post Graduation (PGS) diploma in business management. I began my professional career at the National Center for Studies and Analysis for Population and Development (CENEAPED). I had the opportunity to be recruited directly after finishing my university studies, without having to go through a period of unemployment. I'm currently the Head of the Local Development Studies Department and I am at the same time the National Contact Point (NCP) in Algeria for the Interreg NEXT MED Programme.

During my professional career, I had to go through all the steps. Over the years, my growing experience and skill development have significantly enhanced my technical and managerial capabilities, leading me to the responsible position I now hold. My role is to lead and coordinate multidisciplinary teams in the field, carrying out studies related to local development.



THE DESIRE OF ALGERIAN WOMEN TO START A BUSINESS HAS ACTUALLY MATERIALIZED ON THE GROUND

NADIA KAASSIS

Beyond the social status and the improvement of my financial resources which allowed me to be autonomous and independent, my work within CENEAPED, based essentially on field work, gave me the opportunity to know a very large part of the four corners of my country (East, West, North South), both geographically and socio-culturally, because Algeria is known for the immensity of its territory and for its great sociocultural diversity.

In Algeria, the modification of the Algerian Constitution of March 2016 introduced article 36: Art. 36. (new) — The State works to promote parity between men and women in the job market. The State encourages the promotion of women to responsibilities in public institutions and administrations as well as at the corporate level. What good practices implemented in Algeria would you like to share with the Interreg NEXT MED Programme to improve women’s inclusion in the Mediterranean labour market?

It is true that the recognition of the role of women in Algeria and all of their rights are enshrined through the legislative and regulatory system which integrates them as full players in the process of economic and social development by guaranteeing the principles of equality and non-discrimination between women and men. These rights are guaranteed primarily by the Constitution (articles 37, 40). The right to access to employment is reinforced by Law 90-11 of August 21, 1990 on labour relations,

which articles 17 and 142 protect working women from all forms of discrimination in matters of pay and conditions of work, thus guaranteeing her the right to a salary equal to that of a man. Likewise, under the law, the Algerian woman has the right to have her own property, to manage it personally and to have control over it (article 674 of the civil code). This is how Algeria has always worked for the promotion and empowerment of women. In this sense, measures have been taken by setting up a job creation and entrepreneurship system. The desire of Algerian women to start a business has actually materialized on the ground: according to statistics, between 2019 and 2021, 64% of credits from the National Microcredit Management Agency (ANGEM) were granted to women. In addition to having acquired a status in society, this demonstrates the good reception and acceptability of Algerian society towards women as business leaders and entrepreneurs.

In terms of women's participation in political life, Algerian law guarantees the principle of gender parity. Despite its presence in elected bodies and in government, results still fall short of women's aspirations.

Algeria participates in the Interreg NEXT MED Programme. This is something new for the programme. What are your expectations as National Contact Point regarding the participation of Algerian entities in future NEXT MED projects related to women?

The Interreg NEXT MED is an opportunity for Algerian entities to share with Mediterranean partners their know-how and skills to achieve the objectives and priorities set by the programme, within the framework of joint actions and initiatives. I hope that these initiatives will be built by involving women as project leaders and also as beneficiaries of the project results.

According to the first reactions I had following the information day of Interreg NEXT MED organized in Algiers on the 8th of February 2024, I have no doubt that Algerian women will mark their presence in the 1st call for proposals with innovative project ideas.

CBC Programs was established and I was appointed as the head of department. We grew from one-person-task to a big department with huge responsibilities. We are in charge of negotiating at the highest level with the European Commission, like Financing Agreements, to the very details of implementation by the projects. We are lucky to see the full cycle of our tasks, from our hard work at the office to the results achieved by the projects in the field. This gives me and to my team the biggest work satisfaction because we are never alienated from any part of the work, knowing it always means something in the eligible regions. This satisfaction is what keeps our work going, despite all the challenges we are facing.



**SEVERAL LEGISLATIONS AND STRATEGIES WERE ENFORCED TO
ENCOURAGE WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP.**

ŞEBNEM SÖZER

Ms. Şebnem Sözer, you are the head of cross-border cooperation programmes' department at the General Directorate of Financial Cooperation and Project Implementation – Directorate for European Union Affairs. You represent the national authority of Türkiye for the Interreg NEXT MED Programme. Can you please tell us about your professional career and your current position?

I am an architect. However I have not been practicing since I started to work in my organisation in 2006, which was then called Secretariat General for EU Affairs. As an expert, I was given the task of cross-border cooperation programmes. In the course of the years, the Unit for Cross-border Cooperation was established in 2010 where I was appointed as its coordinator and young colleagues joined in. In 2019, the Department for

According to the World Bank's data from 2022, women's participation in the labour market in Türkiye is 33.2% which is quite high compared to other Mediterranean countries. Could you please share some good practices implemented in your country to contribute to the increase of women participation in the labour market?

Türkiye has adopted several action plans addressing empowerment of women. These include the Strategy Paper and Action Plan for Empowering Women. These are covered under the chapters 23 (judiciary and fundamental rights) and 19 (employment and social policy) in the course of accession negotiations with the EU.

As for specifically women's participation in labour market, several legislations and strategies were enforced to encourage women's employment and entrepreneurship. The work is ongoing for National Employment Strategy 2024-2028 and Strategy for Empowerment of Women and Action Plan 2024-2028.

Türkiye has joined the Interreg NEXT MED Programme. What are your expectations regarding the participation of Turkish organisations in projects related to women inclusion in the labour market?

First of all, let me begin by saying that we are so excited to be joining Interreg NEXT MED Programme. In our two other programmes, namely Bulgaria-Türkiye and the Black Sea Basin CBC Programmes, we had some projects related to empowerment of women. To list some examples, in 2007-2013 period, we had a project under Bulgaria-Türkiye CBC Programme, titled, "Woman is Woman Everywhere" where two NGOs were the beneficiaries, focusing on the social problems of women on two sides of the border and developing joint solutions.

Another example is from the same programme in 2014-2020 period, titled, "ECO WOMAN – Initiatives to Manage Natural Resources for Better Life" whose beneficiaries were a women's NGO (Bulgaria) and Edirne Chamber of Commerce (Türkiye).

Project activities included trainings and implementations related to environmental protection, for environment sensitive labour market targeting women.

A third example is from ENI Black Sea Basin Programme. The Project title is "Black Sea Women Entrepreneurship Connection – Empowering Women through Tourism – WE TOUR." KAGİDER (Women Entrepreneurs Association of Turkey) is the Turkish beneficiary of the project.

We expect that we will have more projects about women's participation and cooperation in Interreg NEXT MED Programme. Knowing this programme has a special focus on empowering of women, we are looking forward to implementing joint projects in this theme.

SECTION SIX

URBAN PLANNING, CIRCULAR ECONOMY AND SOFT MOBILITY FOR MORE LIVEABLE MEDITERRANEAN CITIES



On World Cities Day 2022 (31 October), we interviewed 2 partners from U-SOLVE project to better understand the urban challenges which Mediterranean cities face and how entrepreneurship could be a key towards promoting effective solutions.

FROM PALERMO TO BETHLEHEM: WHAT ARE THE URBAN CHALLENGES WE FACE AND WHAT CAN BE DONE?

INTERVIEW WITH MS. ELIZABETH PARISI FROM ITALY AND MR. KHALED SHANA'A FROM PALESTINE

On 31st October, the United Nations celebrate the World Cities Day. Through this day, it expects to promote cooperation among countries to address urban challenges and contribute to sustainable urban development.

The ENI CBC Med programme funds a project called U-SOLVE which stands for urban sustainable development solutions valuing entrepreneurship. Therefore, we decided to interview two of U-SOLVE partners: one from the north side of the Mediterranean and another one from the south. **Do they share the same urban challenges as Mediterranean cities? What are they? What can be done?** Let's see what Elizabeth Parisi and Khaled Shana'a told us.

Elizabeth Parisi is the coordinator of U-SOLVE project. She has been working with ARCA consortium for the last 20 years. ARCA is a business incubator promoted by the university of Palermo in Italy. She has over 30 years of experience in supporting people to stay in Sicily and set up their own businesses. She supported over 100 start ups and helps turn research activities into business companies.

Khaled Shana'a is the project manager for U-SOLVE and the manager of the Project Department at Palestine Ahliya University, a private university based in Bethlehem, West Bank. He has a master's degree in human rights and democracy and over 20 years of experience in local and international NGOs.

He applies what he learnt from both his academic and professional background in the design and implementation of projects.

WASTE MANAGEMENT, TRANSPORT AND ENERGY: COMMON URBAN CHALLENGES

U-SOLVE partners cover six Mediterranean countries (Cyprus, Egypt, Greece, Italy, Jordan and Palestine). Together, they started with a mapping study to identify the urban challenges faced in the covered regions and ranked them. Based on that, they could see what are the similar problems and what are the specificity of each one of these regions? What came out from this survey is that **waste management, urban transport planning, and sustainable energy** are the most shared challenges in these Mediterranean cities.

If we look into details, we can see that Palestine shares with Jordan the same challenge of water and more globally what we call the **blue infrastructures** (water scarcity, wastewater management, water treatment, and accessibility to water).

When we refer to **green infrastructures**, we realise that the interpretation is different from Palermo to Bethlehem. In Sicily, we would think of lack of green spaces for children or more broadly lack of measures to mitigate climate change effect. While, in the city of Bethlehem, when we talk of green infrastructures, we are referring to the lack of natural resources due to urban expansion and also the loss of space that might be devoted to food production because of urbanization.

Finally, U-SOLVE partnership noticed that **in the case of Greece**, the survey demonstrated that one of the stakeholders' main priorities is the urban health equity mainly referring to the poor air quality in urban areas and its impact on health **while in Egypt**, the top concerns are around the **Water-Energy-Food-Environment nexus**.

FAST GROWING CITIES AND LACK OF URBAN PLANNING

Now that we know what are the main challenges, we would like to understand what are the reasons behind this unsustainable development of Mediterranean cities that we are witnessing for the last 40 years?

According to Khaled Shana'a, the urban model used to plan in southern West Bank did not work as it did not take into account the emerging problem such as climate change and was not inclusive. As urban problems have not been tackled since the very beginning, the problems

grew more and more to the point that we do not have the resources to solve it anymore. In the case of the West Bank, we can still try to plan on the short term but because of a series of factors: geopolitical, security, lack of control of certain areas like area C (which are under Israel control and represent 60 % of the land), it is very hard to plan for long term solutions.

In the case of Palermo, Elizabeth Parisi tells how a more regulated urban planning really started in the late '80 when it was already too late as the city grew a lot between the 1960 and 1980, when heavy development projects were allowed.

Back then, urban planning mostly focused on the reconstruction of the historical centre, destroyed during the second world war, leaving behind other parts of the city. Then, people started facing the gentrification of its historical centre pushing the problems to other areas.

In both cases, citizens living there suffer from the consequences of a lack of systemic urban planning.

CHANGING HABITS

While talking with Khaled and Elizabeth, it was interesting to notice the different habits and how they change according to the place where people live. While in Europe, more and more urban young people don't get their driving licence when they turn 18, in the Middle East, people still prioritise the driving licence for obvious reason such as the lack of a reliable public transport network inside the cities and for less obvious reasons related to security especially for women. Owning a car in the Middle East is still a must while in Europe people living in cities rely more and more on bikes, electric scooters and other options of soft mobility.



ENTREPRENEURS FOR A MORE SUSTAINABLE URBAN DEVELOPMENT

U-SOLVE main focus is to support young people including women who would like to develop innovative and creative ideas and develop their businesses in a sector related to urban challenges.

In Italy, Elizabeth emphasizes on **the importance of creativity and art** to propose solutions that can modify consolidated behaviours and gain social and environmental impact. She believes that creativity is very useful to change the culture of entrepreneurship. We tend to associate new solutions with start-ups developing the latest IT tool or app while sometimes the solution comes from creative ideas in traditional sectors and companies.

In Palestine, the focus is different. Most people who work do it in the informal economy. Therefore, the efforts should be put to **organise the informal economy**, and this is not necessarily through formalizing the informal but also by finding

innovative ways to make entrepreneurs' lives easier. The Palestinian authority has implemented some incentives. For example, a small business is exempted from paying taxes during the first 6 months. These incentives are not enough, but it is still a first encouraging step.

Even if each Mediterranean city has its own characteristics, at the end of the day, we all need energy and water, we all need to move (to school, work, hospital, shopping, sport and leisure activities, ...) and we all generate waste. Based on that, we can start to change some habits on how we do things, extend the use of available renewable resources such as solar energy and try to change the culture of entrepreneurship with the active support of the relevant authorities.

Who knows, may be some creative ideas from Greece will offer a solution to Bethlehem transport congestion and a Jordanian innovative start-up may apply its solution for waste management in Palermo. Let's see what the subgrantees of U-SOLVE project will offer in the coming months.



While Mediterranean city centres witness big changes, putting creativity at the heart of current challenges is what INNOMED-UP project wanted to tackle to bring small shops and craftspeople back to historic centres in a sustainable approach.

INNOMED-UP PROJECT COMBINES CIRCULAR ECONOMY AND CREATIVITY TO REVITALIZE MEDITERRANEAN CITY CENTRES

INTERVIEW WITH MS. SOFIA AVGERINO KOLONIAS FROM GREECE

Born in Egypt, of Greek nationality, Sofia Avgerinou Kolonias is professor emeritus at the National Technical University of Athens (NTUA) at the School of Architectural Engineering, Department of Regional and Urban Planning. She is the coordinator and scientific manager of INNOMED-UP project, funded by the ENI CBC MED programme. She and her team have worked hard and dedicated a lot of time over the last 4 years to set up this project which focuses on promoting the circular economy with small creative businesses in Mediterranean city centres.

CIRCULAR ECONOMY AND CREATIVITY FOR A BETTER REGIONAL PLANNING

Prof. Avgerinou Kolonias has been working on the revitalization of historic cities for over 20 years. The starting point of the INNOMED-UP project comes from the fact that the city centres of many Mediterranean cities like Athens are suffering the consequences of urban development plans which lead to the gentrification of city centres while driving away craftspeople and small shops. It is from this observation that she and her partners have worked on how to revitalize urban centres in the Mediterranean region using creativity and in collaboration with Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), particularly those working in the sector of the circular economy.

According to Prof. Avgerinou Kolonias, historic Mediterranean cities were born from creativity. They are centres of creativity and commerce (products generated by this creativity). The cities that participated in this project (Athens in Greece, Palermo and Prato in Italy, Irbid in Jordan, Hebron and Nablus in Palestine and Tunis in Tunisia) are all different but share similar Mediterranean characteristics. **The partners first studied the different cities and divided them according to the degree of creativity and circularity they use.** Some are adopting innovative technological methods to address climate change while others maintain the use of traditional methods.

Thanks to this, a cross-border dialogue between the two shores was set up, which enabled these cities to exchange ideas and initiatives that could be developed by getting inspired from each other through the good practices implemented in these different cities.

SOFT URBAN MOBILITY TO CONNECT CRAFTSPEOPLE AND CREATORS

Clusters have been created in each of these cities where the idea is **to reduce waste, connect craftspeople who produce leftovers from their production with creators who can reuse these leftovers.**



CONVINCING PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS AND MAKING THESE TYPES OF INITIATIVES KNOWN, OFFER OPPORTUNITIES TO COLLABORATE AND DISSEMINATE IDEAS THAT ALLOW US TO MOVE FORWARD IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF MODELS THAT COMBINE SUSTAINABILITY AND THE REVITALIZATION OF CITY CENTERS

PROF. AVGERINOU KOLONIAS

Bicycles made from reused materials were built to transport those leftovers to the creators. This soft mode of transport is also ideal for getting around either in medinas with narrow streets or in cities with lots of traffic jams.

A platform has also been created to facilitate contact between the different stakeholders. Thus, clusters of textiles, leather, paper, plastic, electronic equipment were created as we can see on the map of Athens below.

BRINGING TEXTILE CRAFTSMEN AND JEWELERS BACK TO CENTRAL ATHENS

As mentioned above, urban development plans of the 1980s/1990s moved craftspeople out of the city centre. Sewing workshops and jewelers have been replaced by cafes, restaurants and other leisure activities. A city like Athens, which was known as a cultural tourist destination and an obligatory stopover before going to the islands, is now in the list of European capitals of urban tourism.





Low-cost airlines as well as tourist apartment rentals contribute to making this city increasingly inaccessible for its own inhabitants. How can we adapt to these changes while trying to bring the traditional sectors known from Athens back to its center? Clothes and jewellery can find buyers among tourists.

Small initiatives like the one developed by INNOMED-UP can contribute to a change that both promotes a circular economy model and supports craftspeople and small shops.

INVOLVE ALL RELEVANT STAKEHOLDERS FOR A BETTER GOVERNANCE MODEL

In a project like INNOMED-UP which brings together various entities (universities, public enterprise, municipalities and NGOs) and countries where the governance systems are very different (centralized, decentralized, etc.), the challenge is significant. This is also what makes it so rich. In certain cases, town halls have a circular economy strategy but do not involve craftsmen and small businesses.



In other cases, citizens have a lot of will and involvement, but the town hall does not (yet) have an action plan in this sector. Sometimes, the competences of certain entities interfere with the competence's of others, which makes the task even more difficult.

For example, a municipality is responsible for waste management and the granting of building permits but in certain cases this can overlap with another plan which depends on the Ministry of Equipment and Public Works.

Thanks to all these configurations, by analysing and exchanging them, partners learned a lot and were able to sign Memoranda of Understandings with different stakeholders. But beyond that, **nothing is more effective than setting up pilot initiatives and demonstrating their usefulness** to convince the different governance structures of the importance of associating different actors to tackle the challenges of the city of tomorrow. It is long and slow, but for a Mediterranean person like Prof. Avgerinou Kolonias, these efforts are worth it.

SECTION SEVEN

BOOSTING NEW TOOLS TO DIVERSIFY MEDITERRANEAN TOURISM: BEE-TOURISM, INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE AND GAMIFICATION



Find out how iHERITAGE in Portugal promotes the Mediterranean diet, acknowledged by UNESCO as an intangible cultural heritage since 2013. The Mediterranean diet is also a mean to attract visitors to unknown places and promote a lifestyle that is part of the Mediterranean identity.

iHERITAGE PROJECT: A TOOL TO PROMOTE THE MEDITERRANEAN DIET AND DIVERSIFY TOURISM

INTERVIEW WITH MS. ALEXANDRA GONÇALVES FROM PORTUGAL

The year of 2023 comes to an end and we should not forget to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the UNESCO intangible cultural heritage and the 10th anniversary of the Mediterranean diet being recognised by the UNESCO as an intangible cultural heritage asset. Beyond the symbol of our healthy, slow, outdoor and community way of living, the Mediterranean diet has to be preserved as part of our identity and shared as part of an intercultural experience.

WHAT DOES INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE MEAN?

When we think of cultural heritage, what usually come to our mind are tangible assets such as monuments. However, the concept embraces much more than archaeological sites and valuable historical buildings.

Cultural heritage englobes traditions or living expressions inherited from our ancestors and passed on to our descendants, such as oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe or the knowledge and skills to produce traditional crafts. All these assets have an important role to maintain cultural diversity. An understanding of the intangible cultural heritage of different communities **helps with intercultural dialogue and encourages mutual respect for other ways of life**^[1].

That is why the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) ratified the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2003. Twenty years later, in a complex globalised world, it seems necessary to remind the importance of our cultural diversity and celebrate it.

^[1] What is Intangible Cultural Heritage? - intangible heritage - Culture Sector - UNESCO



IN A WORLD THAT GOES AT A HIGH SPEED, IN WHICH GOING FAST MARKS OUR PACE, WE EASILY FORGET THE SLOW, AUTHENTIC MEDITERRANEAN LIFESTYLE. A WAY OF LIVING THAT CONNECTS WITH OUR TERRITORIES THROUGH HARVESTING, FISHING PRACTICES, ETC.

MRS GONÇALVES, RESPONSIBLE OF iHERITAGE IN PORTUGAL

PROMOTING MEDITERRANEAN UNESCO CULTURAL HERITAGE ASSETS THROUGH iHERITAGE PROJECT

The ENI CBC MED programme wanted to know more about Mediterranean UNESCO cultural heritage assets and what role does iHERITAGE project play in promoting some of them. We took the time to interview Ms. Alexandra Gonçalves, teacher and researcher at the University of Algarve with a PhD in tourism and a special focus on cultural tourism.

She is the responsible of the implementation of iHERITAGE in Portugal. This project aimed to use IT tools such as Augmented Reality, Virtual Reality, the development of applications on smartphones to enhance the access to Mediterranean UNESCO cultural assets.

In the case of Portugal, the university of Algarve together with the municipality of Tavira, the Science Centre of Tavira and Algarve as well as Artgilão worked to promote the Mediterranean diet as an intangible cultural heritage asset by developing routes in which visitors can live the experience of a Mediterranean lifestyle.

PORTUGAL, A MEDITERRANEAN COUNTRY

Although Portugal does not have direct coast to the Mediterranean Sea, some regions of the country are really Mediterranean, mainly Alentejo

and Algarve. Not only does Portugal is ranked 7th worldwide in olive oil production in 2023, but also the traditions, the community lifestyle, the crops people grow, all these aspects indicate that Portuguese people especially from the South are, and feel Mediterranean.

10TH ANNIVERSARY OF MEDITERRANEAN DIET INSCRIBED ON UNESCO INTANGIBLE HERITAGE LIST

In 2013, the UNESCO registered the Mediterranean diet on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. This recognition is important to know more about the Mediterranean identity and its authentic values, to be more aware of them and then promote it to make sure we preserve it and pass it to the next generations.

As Ms Gonçalves explained, it is not an easy task to define the Mediterranean diet as it is linked to everyday life practices, to repeated actions. It is related to values inside our minds and community. Hence, the difficulty to explain it to other people. It is closely linked to the weather, to outdoor living, to sharing meals in big groups.

In a world that goes at a high speed, in which going fast marks our pace, we easily forget the slow, authentic Mediterranean lifestyle. A way of living that connects with our territories through harvesting, fishing practices, etc.



**iHERITAGE IMPLEMENTS IT TOOLS
TO GET TO KNOW MEDITERRANEAN DIET
IN THE SOUTH OF PORTUGAL**

The region of Algarve is mainly visited by people attracted by the sun and beach tourism. However, the region has much more to offer. Therefore, iHERITAGE partner, the university of Algarve, worked with many entities such as the municipality of Tavira, local vineyards, the regional board of tourism, olive oil producers, craftsmen to create a new narrative that promotes the Mediterranean diet.

Thanks to IT tools, they developed augmented reality leaflets and virtual routes through an application available on Android and iOS.

These routes can only be activated once the visitors are there. They can enjoy an olive oil route, get to know locals and their stories, visit vineyards and

taste local wine, take part in a workshop to learn about traditional handicrafts. By the end of the day the idea is to make people discover hidden places in the rural areas of the interior of Algarve region.

**BOOSTING SUSTAINABLE TOURISM AND THE
LOCAL ECONOMY**

The Algarve region is aware of the importance of tourism diversification and since the last 3 decades, it has started planning for a different tourism. Moreover, this region witnesses the desertification of people from rural areas. It is much easier to make out a living working on the coast, leaving the interior region nearly empty. That's why project such as iHERITAGE not only remind us on the importance of Mediterranean diet in our lives but also could contribute to slow down the rural exodus and demonstrate that another tourism is possible.



Anny visited Cyprus thanks to MedBEEsinessHubs project. She shared the experience with her 40.000 followers. We interviewed her to discuss about new ways of communicating EU funded projects.

DISCOVERING THE BEE TOURISM WITH ANNY, TRAVEL BLOGGER

INTERVIEW WITH ANNY FROM LITHUANIA

Anny was born in Lithuania and moved to Lisbon when she was 20. She still lives there, where she works at an eyewear company while building a new home with her husband. For some years now, Anny has been working on a personal project based on her biggest passion: traveling.

Since 2017 Anny is managing her personal blog <http://www.travelwithanny.com> and her Instagram account which boasts nearly 40K followers. Through these platforms, she shares her travel experiences, providing advice on places to visit, recommended hotels, and activities for each destination. Her stories and articles offer people useful tips for their future trips.

Some weeks ago, Anny had the opportunity to travel to Cyprus, where she discovered MeedBEEsinessHubs project which has been preparing a comprehensive and tasteful experience centered around beekeeping and honey. MeedBEEsinessHubs has been working for nearly two years to promote the Bee Economy concept based on honeybee products and services, including in the context of tourism.

Now, it's time to share this experience with the world. They decided to collaborate with a travel blogger, a content creator, or a so-called "influencer" to try the experience and share it with others. Anny was contacted by the Cyprus Chamber of Commerce



CONTENT CREATORS HAVE THE CAPABILITY TO ENGAGE NEW AUDIENCES, CREATING EYE-CAPTIVATING PICTURES AND STORIES. MANY OF MY FOLLOWERS EXPRESSED THEIR SURPRISE WHEN THEY LEARNED THAT COOPERATION PROJECTS COULD DO SUCH INNOVATIVE THINGS LIKE MEDBEESSINESSHUBS

ANNY, TRAVEL BLOGGER

and Industry, lead beneficiary of the project, and enthusiastically accepted the invitation. She spent 4 days in Cyprus, where the project accompanied her to explore the world of bee-tourism, also known as **Apitourism**.

Anny's posts and stories garnered **thousands of likes and hundreds of comments** from her followers, who expressed their gratitude for the tips and requested more information. She created videos and photos in the first person, showcasing how one can live this unique tourism experience, creating interaction among followers, the content creator and even the destination managers. Times are changing when it comes to promoting products, especially in visually and sensorially engaging experiences like this one thanks to MedBEEsinessHubs.

After her trip, Anny agreed to have a conversation with the ENI CBC MED Programme to share her experience and discuss how content creators can contribute to the communication of EU-funded projects. She revealed that local tourism agencies often collaborate with influencers to promote destinations, but this was the first time she heard about a European cooperation project doing so. Her followers were also surprised.

Promoting destinations through this channel has several clear advantages: travel influencers can reach larger audiences (some even up to 1M followers), but more importantly, they can engage their audience and interact with them while showcasing eye-catching pictures and stories. This goes far beyond the traditional TV commercial or advertising poster.



Travel bloggers can also introduce people these *not-so-crowded* places, new eco-friendly alternatives, or simply recommend a new restaurant or activity that suits their taste better.

For cooperation projects, turning into content creators represents **a fresh opportunity to shift towards more engaging communication**, reaching younger audiences, and breaking away from the bureaucratic and corporate style that projects are sometimes bound to.

And it's not just about tourism; content creators are already discussing topics like research, startups, training opportunities, nature protection, and practically any subject you can think of. Anny used to be the type of person who planned every detail of

her trip, but nowadays she lets herself go a bit more and enjoys the journey as it unfolds.

Her future plans include completing her new home and, of course, traveling at least once per month. She'd like to experience more nature tourism in Costa Rica, the Philippines, or go on a safari, with the goal of turning her passion into her way of living, sharing her tips and thoughts with her community for every place she visits.

Meanwhile, in mid-summer, the quintessential season for traveling, the ENI CBC MED Programme reflects on how future project communication should evolve, what new resources are available, and how audiences are changing, all with the ultimate goal of showcasing their projects to the world.



Let's play in the Mediterranean region. Xavi Socías, a Spanish partner of the MED GAIMS project, shares his valuable experience in integrating gamification into the tourism sector.

MED GAIMS PROJECT: HOW GAMIFICATION CAN HAVE A REAL IMPACT ON TOURISM DIVERSIFICATION

INTERVIEW WITH MR. XAVI SOCÍAS FROM SPAIN

MED GAIMS: CREATING GAMES FOR BOOSTING TOURISM OFF-SEASON AND IN LESSER-KNOWN DESTINATIONS

MED GAIMS “GAmification for Memorable tourist experienceS” is a project funded by the European Union under the ENICBC Med Programme. It gathers 7 partners from four Mediterranean countries - Italy, Jordan, Lebanon and Spain coordinated by the American University of Beirut.

The main idea of the project is to promote experiential tourism to off-season travellers in view of increasing the potential of lesser-known tourist destinations while developing the local economy by creating quality jobs in the game design sector. To do this, each participating country developed 10 games (in physical and virtual format) totalling with the creation of 40 games all over the Mediterranean region. The project received a grant from the European Union worth €2.1 million.

XAVI SOCÍAS : A JOURNEY TOWARDS GAMIFICATION INSPIRED BY MED GAIMS PROJECT

Xavi Socías is a smiley man who has the experience of an entrepreneur and the spirit of a boy who never stopped playing games. After graduating in tourism, he started working in this sector focusing on the organisation of events. He organised performances and interactive activities such as team building. Costumes and theatre played a central role in these events.

Workwise, things were going well for him. He arrived in September 2016 with his laptop at Neapolis, the agency of local innovation of the municipality of Villanova i la Geltrú, located about 50 km south of Barcelona, Spain. This agency offers a co-working place which was a good option for Xavi to develop his work and his network. He set up his own company and recruited up to 5 people.

After developing activities for a couple of years, he felt like expanding and diversifying his offer. He started looking into gamification. This is when Neapolis offered him the opportunity to develop 10 games (analog and digital) adapted to the local context of Villanova i la Geltrú through a project called MED GAIMS.

He did not want to give up his own company, so he decided to work part time for MED GAIMS while dedicating the other part to keep running his business as well as studying a master's degree to increase his knowledge in gamification and applying it directly in the project.

March 2020 arrived with its unpredictable pandemic that hit him as the rest of the world. All what he built during the past years was stopped and he ended up closing his business. But, as MED GAIMS was going on while he was still studying for his master's degree in gamification, this allowed him to keep working in what he likes: he started developing games connected to the place where he lives.

Today, in May 2023, he is an employee of Neapolis and dedicates his work to designing games and promoting those he had developed in the framework of MED GAIMS.

HOW DO THESE GAMES CONTRIBUTE TO CONNECT WITH THE PLACES ONE VISITS AND LIVE NEW EXPERIENCES?

One of the advantages of MED GAIMS is that it had foreseen different types of games: some of them are designed to play alone (i.e., wearing virtual reality glasses) or to play in group (i.e., treasure hunt), or street games to mention a few. In the case of Vilanova I la Geltrú, one of the games developed is called 'Gastrosecret'. The gamer has to wander around the town to find the ingredients to prepare a local dish. The person may need to go to the municipal market, interact with the people to ask about the ingredients, to complete a sentence of a local proverb, etc. It is a nice way to discover traditional food of the area while talking with locals. At the end of the game, you may want to buy the ingredients to prepare the dish or taste it in one of the local restaurants.

MORE IMPACT ON LOCAL AND NATIONAL TOURISM

Xavi was surprised to see that these games were quite successful among locals. He didn't expect that. The specific context and the timing in which these games were released could partly explain this local enthusiasm. We were living under COVID-19 restrictions with nearly no travel abroad and people were eager to be outdoors after the lockdown. Back then, people were fed up with the digital world and valued more physical games.

Having said that, they have developed the games (Agency of Secrets) in 3 different languages (Catalan, Spanish and English). It may have been relevant to have it in French as well knowing that 60 % of international tourists visiting this town come from France as it is quite close from the border. This booklet was free of charge during MED GAIMS project and now you will need to pay a fee to have it and be able to play.

WHAT IS THE ADDED VALUE OF SUCH A PROJECT AT MEDITERRANEAN LEVEL?

Culturally speaking, for Xavi, it was enriching to interact with such a variety of partners, each one of them with their own cultural background, references, and work pace. He learnt to adjust to the team and be more aware of certain cultural sensitivities. For example, when referring to games, from this side of the Mediterranean (west), in most of the legends, we depict the pirates as Arab people while from the other side of the Mediterranean (east), Europeans were considered as the bad guys. It helped him break some stereotypes.

On another level, working with people living in countries where crisis is part of their daily life, made him also re-think the way to apprehend certain events. He was in an online meeting with his Lebanese partner when the port of Beirut exploded on the 4th August 2020. He was amazed by the capacity of resilience of his colleagues in Lebanon.

Finally, from a professional point of view, he learnt a lot from his experienced partners, but he also learnt other skills: how to have a vision, to plan, to implement an international project.

**HOW DOES MED GAIMS HAVE A DIRECT
IMPACT ON LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT?**

According to Xavi, there are at least 3 direct impacts that prove this project benefits local economy. Firstly, out of the 10 games that were developed, 5 were foreseen to be developed by the official partner and the other 5 through grants that were awarded to entrepreneurs and SMEs through a hackathon. Out of these 5 beneficiaries: at least 3 of them got a job in the gamification sector, one of them developed his already existing SME and another one created a portfolio of his work thanks to this experience. Secondly, once these games were developed, the city council of Vilanova i la Geltrú has launched a tender to commercialize a new tourism product to promote its town as an attractive destination to spend a weekend. Thirdly, through the games, people are willing to discover and taste local products and go to the local restaurants mentioned previously.

**WHAT'S NEXT AFTER MED GAIMS
EXPERIENCE?**

For Xavi, there is a before and an after MED GAIMS. Not only did he gain in experience, knowledge, and visibility but he is regularly invited to represent the project, his city or Neapolis for whom he works to share his experience and vision! It really opened his mind and contributed to his personal growth. He has lots of ideas and projects to keep exploring new horizons, apply the methodologies learnt from

the project, expand them to other sectors (i.e., educational one) and keep connecting with the territory.

**LESSONS LEARNT AND ADVICE TO START A
NEW INTERREG NEXT MED PROJECT**

The last two recommendations that Xavi would like to share with anyone interested in taking part in a Mediterranean cooperation project are the following:

When you write a proposal, the more you include partners with expertise in a specific sector, the better it is. Then, make sure you involve the most relevant stakeholders since the beginning of the project in the decision-making. If they feel part of the project, there is a higher probability that they will defend it and promote it to have a full impact locally.

ENI CBC MED would like to congratulate Xavi Socías and all MED GAIMS partners for this successful project and wish to hear more stories about how these projects positively impact the life of people across the Mediterranean region.

MED GAIMS has been awarded the first Mediterranean digital prize for its contribution to improve competitiveness in the tourism sector through the use of digital technologies while involving several partners from the Mediterranean region.





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NEXT MED

FROM ENI CBC MED TO INTERREG NEXT MED PROGRAMME: ADVANCING COOPERATION ACROSS THE MEDITERRANEAN

Building on the successful experiences of the ENPI (2007-2013) and ENI (2014-2020) cross-border cooperation (CBC) Med programmes, the Interreg NEXT MED Programme aims to further enhance Euro-Mediterranean cooperation for the period 2021-2027. This initiative operates under the European Union's Cohesion Policy and its 'Interreg' instrument, which supports European Territorial Cooperation across regions and countries. NEXT MED is implemented under Strand B, 'Transnational cooperation,' of the external dimension of Interreg, facilitating cooperation over large transnational territories or around sea basins between EU Member States and Southern Neighbourhood partner countries.

The programme aspires to contribute to smart, sustainable, and equitable development across the Mediterranean basin by fostering balanced, long-lasting cooperation and multilevel governance. Its mission is to finance cooperation projects addressing joint socio-economic, environmental, and governance challenges at the Mediterranean level. These include the uptake of advanced technologies, competitiveness of SMEs and job creation, energy efficiency, sustainable water management, climate change adaptation, transition to a circular and resource-efficient economy, education and training, and healthcare.

The cooperation area, home to over 200 million inhabitants, spans 15 countries. Thirteen of these participated in previous programme editions: Cyprus, Egypt, France, Greece, Israel, Italy, Lebanon, Jordan, Malta, Palestine, Portugal, Spain, and Tunisia. Two new members, Algeria and Türkiye, have joined for this cycle.

The European Union's contribution to the Programme amounts to €263 million, including €240 million allocated for project funding and €23 million for Technical Assistance, dedicated to management and implementation. The budget is sourced from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the Instrument for Pre-Accession (IPA III), and the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI).

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STORIES OF PEOPLE SHAPING A BETTER MEDITERRANEAN

