

CREACT  **MED**
CREATIVE MEDITERRANEAN



Co-Funded by the European Union
بتسويل مشترك من الاتحاد الأوروبي

CREACT4MED INTERVIEWS WITH THE ENTREPRENEURS





CREACT4MED is a project funded by the European Union (EU) through the EuropeAid Programme, that aims to strengthen businesses and entrepreneurship in the cultural and creative industries (CCIs) in the Southern Neighbourhood of the EU, with a particular focus on young people and women. A central third pillar to achieve these goals, was to provide direct financial support start-ups; Micro, Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (MSMEs), or civil society organisations working in the Southern Mediterranean in the cultural and creative industries. The grants were used to implement so the selected businesses could launch a product or service, internationalise their business, or simply enhance their activities to grow and create employment for their local area. This support helped our 23 entrepreneurs to launch their businesses, harness innovation, and contribute to a thriving CCI MENA region.

The CREAT4MED Entrepreneurs are the cornerstone of the project, demonstrating the potential of the CCI in the Southern Mediterranean through their work, their passion and their achievements. The entrepreneurs work across the cultural and creative industries in sectors ranging from virtual reality and handicrafts to gastronomy and online platforms. We interviewed our entrepreneurs, discovering their stories, the real impact they were able to make with support from CREAT4MED, and their plans for the future.

EGYPT

Threads of Transformation: Almah's Sustainable Fashion Revolution



Manal Saleh, Founder and CEO of the sustainable fashion start-up Almah, traces her entrance into the creative and cultural industries back to her passion for social impact and charitable work done for the Egyptian Clothing Bank. Despite not having a professional career earlier in life, Manal founded Almah from scratch in 2020, driven by the need to address textile waste generated in Egypt. ALMAH is an Egyptian sustainable fashion brand that repurposes virgin Egyptian vintage material into up-cycled contemporary high-end fashion pieces, created unique items for resale and produces up-cycled fabric swatches for luxury fashion houses. With a unique approach centred on reusing materials, Almah's journey began, driven by a passion for sustainability and social impact. Without the support of CREAT4MED, Almah's innovative designs may have remained hidden. The subgranting scheme, which Manal started to implement in early 2023, provided a vital boost to Almah's visibility, facilitating essential marketing efforts that were previously financially out of reach for a charitable organization. Through CREAT4MED's support, Almah could invest in professional photo shoots, website development, and e-commerce platforms, amplifying their impact and reach. In 2023, Almah showcased their SS23 collection at Maison 69, Jozee Boutique, Mad Stitches and Posh and their vintage collection at Cairo Vintage Souq, Cairo Flea Market, Darb 15, MAZ and Redefine Flea Market.

Celebrating Achievements and Upholding Sustainability

One of Manal’s proudest achievements is the establishment of Almah itself. With its focus on empowering women through sustainable practices, Almah stands as a beacon of innovation and change in the fashion industry. Almah’s participation in Egypt Fashion Week in May 2023 marked a significant milestone, with the Coral Blues Collection drawing attention to the preservation of the Red Sea’s corals. This appearance led to Almah’s feature in Vogue magazine for their sustainable efforts, Almah continues to redefine fashion with purpose. This is underscored by their initiative raising awareness on the circular economy and repurposing waste: “From Waste to Good Taste”. A four day event held in Egypt under a collaboration with The Italian Embassy in Cairo heralds a future where creativity meets conscious consumption and sustainable practices.

Achievements with CREAT4MED - Almah

- 7 jobs created
- Launched their website
- Featured in Egypt Fashion Week and Vogue magazine
- From Waste To Good Taste initiative launched
- Produced a scalable collection of 300 pieces

Manal gives her advice to budding entrepreneurs



Manal highlights that the creative and cultural industries pose unique challenges, especially for ventures like Almah. Scaling and expansion present hurdles due to restrictions on investments and reliance on grants. However, CREAT4MED’s support in branding has been instrumental in overcoming these challenges, ensuring Almah’s long-term sustainability and impact.

Manal underscores the importance of originality and impact in the creative and cultural sectors. “Be original” she says, “we are in a world that already has everything”. In a world saturated with options, businesses must stand out with ethical practices and a vision for positive change. Embracing entrepreneurship later in life, Manal finds freedom from insecurities and a rapid pace of progress. With courage and a structured approach, she believes age is no barrier to entrepreneurial success. There are boundless opportunities for emerging entre-

preneurs in the Southern Mediterranean, she says. With a shifting consumer landscape favouring ethical and impactful businesses, she believes the stage is set for creative ventures to thrive. Investing in technologies and embracing deeper ethical models will shape the future of the industry, making it an exciting time for those with a vision for change.



Design for a Cause: REFORM Studio’s Journey in Sustainable Design

Crafting Change: A Tale of REFORM Studio’s Inception

Meet Mariem Hazem, and her business partner and best friend, Hend Riad. Mariem and Hend embarked on a transformative journey in 2012 when they founded REFORM Studio. What began as a project for a class at university, transformed into a mission amidst the backdrop of Egypt’s revolution, and economic crisis, to tackle the country’s waste crisis. The pair saw an opportunity to repurpose plastic waste and simultaneously maintain the traditional practice of looming which is in decline in Cairo. They



invented a new material made entirely from recycled plastic and repurposed it to produce high-quality fashion garments, accessories, and even furniture. Thus, in combining sustainable practices with cultural heritage, REFORM Studio was born – a lifestyle brand pioneering eco-friendly materials and empowering local artisans.

CREACT4MED’s Empowering Support

CREACT4MED played a pivotal role in REFORM Studio’s growth trajectory, Mariem explains, offering crucial financial support that enabled them to expand their workshop and team. With CREAT4MED’s backing, REFORM Studio established a presence in the UAE with their pop-up shop, laying the foundation for their long-term vision of becoming an international sustainable brand. The establishment of the pop-up led to a collaboration with renowned department store Galeries Lafayette in Dubai. This partnership underscores their international recognition and the impact of their sustainable ethos.



Addressing Challenges and Raising Awareness

Navigating the creative and cultural industries comes with its own set of challenges, particularly in traditionally male-dominated crafts. REFORM Studio confronts these hurdles by raising awareness of the plastic pollution crisis and empowering local artisans, challenging gender norms, and preserving traditional craftsmanship through inclusive training and recruitment. Through storytelling and community engagement, they aim to increase consumer involvement in their business and amplify their message of inclusivity and sustainability across the industry.

Achievements with CREAT4MED - Reform

- 5 new jobs created
- 1 new shop opened in Dubai
- Collection displayed at Galeries LaFayette
- 237 products produced
- 7000 plastic bags saved

Mariam's Take on Essential Qualities for Entrepreneurial Success

Perseverance and a deep-seated belief in one's purpose are paramount for success in the creative and cultural sectors, according to Mariem. Networking is equally essential, facilitating collaboration and learning opportunities. Through CREAT4MED, REFORM Studio has forged valuable connections with like-minded entrepreneurs through events such as the Summer School and kickoff event, paving the way for future collaborations and mutual growth. Mariem offers sage advice to aspiring entrepreneurs, emphasizing the importance of resilience and maintaining perspective amidst the challenges of entrepreneurship. Taking a step back and focusing on the bigger picture can provide clarity and renewed energy to overcome obstacles.

Envisioning a Sustainable Future

Mariem envisions a future where REFORM Studio evolves into an unshakable international brand, driven by an increasing global awareness of sustainability. As society becomes more conscious of its environmental footprint, opportunities for eco-friendly products and heritage preservation abound. While challenges persist, the momentum toward sustainability is promising, fueled by the efforts of pioneering entrepreneurs like REFORM Studio.



Toy Chest Treasures: Duma Toys’ Handcrafted Delights



Duma Toys was founded by Abo Alazem to provide ethical, sustainable and safe products for children made from quality materials and artisanal Egyptian craftsmanship. The name Duma comes from the Arabic word “دمى” for dolls. The company was founded with the aim of introducing innovative, and entertaining toys to kids. Their toys are designed to be fun and interactive, to spark children’s imagination and encourage them to spend more time playing with their toys enhancing mental and psychological development.

Prior to launching Duma Toys, Abo was involved in a project providing crochet training for underprivileged and refugee women to help them learn a new skill and earn a fair income. From there, he had the idea to start “Duma Toys,” specializing in Amigurumi, a Japanese art of toy and doll making. Since the Amigurumi art was not popular in Egypt, they started training women to create a workforce. Over the last six years, they have trained over 800 women in this unique technique, providing them with employment opportunities.

Achievements with CREAT4MED – Duma Toys

- 5 new jobs created
- 20 new designs of baby clothing created
- 10 new toy designs
- 100 job opportunities created
- Doll customization tool developed
- Exhibited at the Birmingham Autumn Trade Fair

Broadening horizons with CREAT4MED

With the CREAT4MED subgrant, Duma Toys aimed to expand their market reach, engaging with a wider audience through improving the digital tools on their website. They did so by adding a customisation feature for the dolls and adding new product lines to the current range. First, Duma managed to attract international buyers through its presence in one of the UK and Europe's biggest trade shows in the field of gifts and toys. The participation of Duma at the Autumn Fair in Birmingham UK opened many opportunities for export by linking with distributors, retailers, and other businesses.

“This (the Autumn Fair in Birmingham UK) was a big milestone for us, we gathered great insights, valuable feedback, and many leads to potential clients.” - Abo Alazem, Founder and CEO

Over 25 leads were established from small local stores to distributors and toy brands that order container loads, with one order being fulfilled in early February as a result of their participation at the UK fair. After the successful participation in the Autumn Fair, and the order received, Duma decided to fully finance its participation in the Spring Fair held between 4th and 7th February 2023.

The second activity was the creation of the doll customisation feature, which started with a photoshoot of the doll variations hiring a professional photographer and then commissioning a freelance developer to create the digital feature. During the first months of the project, a freelance designer was hired to create 20 new designs for a baby clothing collection, after completing the designing process a sample manager was hired to turn these designs into samples. Once the sampling finished over 100 job opportunities were created to produce the new collections. During the implementation period between the mid-term and the end date, they decided, based on the trends, feedback, and observation of the international market, that it was necessary to add new product lines to be able to compete with other countries and toy suppliers.

Looking ahead, Duma Toys see that customisable services from creatives such as theirs will be in high demand in the industry, so they're excited about the next steps for Duma as a primary player for handmade toys in the region.



Curtains Up: Teatro Al Saeed Brings Performing Arts to El Minya

Meet Mostafa Mohamed: Project Manager at Teatro Al Saeed. Teatro Al Saeed for Theater and Arts is a company with multiple experiences in the field of performing arts. It started as an initiative in 2014 and was established as a company in January 2022. It seeks to establish a relationship between artists and the community in Upper Egypt by providing a space for practising arts, holding workshops and artistic performances, and always trying to enhance the independent theatre troupes by providing administrative and artistic advice to the troupes or by providing the requirements of a theatre space with low prices.

Teatro Al Saeed has made significant strides in bringing arts and culture to Upper Egypt, a region where such creative and artistic opportunities are scarce. Mostafa's passion for theatre and acting fueled his desire to create a professional theatre space for children in El Minya. His journey, which began with small performances and workshops, eventually led to the establishment of Teatro Al Saeed, a platform that has trained numerous artists and provided a stage for countless performances.



Before starting his work at Teatro Al Saeed, Mostafa spent five years working in Cairo at the Hakawy International Arts Festival for Children, where he honed his skills in arts education. His academic background in English Literature and his passion for theatre, nurtured during his university years, set the stage for his future endeavours. His involvement in various theatre troops and his focus on storytelling and workshops for children marked the beginning of his illustrious career in the arts.

Launching the Performing Arts Incubator: the impact of CREAT4MED

The CREAT4MED subgrant, training, and network had a significant impact on the development of Teatro Al Saeed. Their project was to launch the Performing Arts Incubator in El Minya which combined training in performing arts skills such as script writing, scenography, theatre direction, and the art of acting itself, as well as courses on business management. Mostafa explained that success in the creative and cultural sectors requires a blend of artistic talent and a dedicated business team to manage funding and marketing. This kind of training is vital in El Minya since currently, interested people must travel to Cairo to get access to this knowledge. Due to the success of the Performing Arts Incubator, El Minya has attracted experts and professionals to learn and share their knowledge. This inclusivity initiative has made it easier for women, who often face travel restrictions, to access skills and training locally.

The Incubator engaged with 23 theatre companies at their information session, working with 4 of those in the incubation and engaging 70 trainees. 12 new jobs were created with plans to hire 5 more people and indirectly support another 30 artists through their shows. Following the success of the Incubator, Teatro Al Saeed was able to position itself as a worthy applicant for further funding, with which it improved its facilities, including opening a new 70-seat venue and installing air conditioning and a sound system.

Achievements with CREAT4MED - Teatro Al Saeed

- Launched the Teatro Al Saeed Performing Arts Incubator engaging 70 trainees
- Created 12 jobs and supported the creation of 35 others, 17 of which for women
- Held their final shows with 887 attendees



Formalising the CCI in Egypt

Mostafa shared some of the challenges he encountered during his journey, from sustainability issues to funding difficulties. He acknowledges that artists often struggle to make a living from their performances, necessitating constant applications for grants and funding. This is often due to the fact that often people treat arts and culture as a “waste of time”, meaning for young emerging theatre artists, it’s not easy to commit to theatre as a profession. Teatro Al Saeed sees this reflected in the lack of funding for their programmes, however, through diversifying their funding sources, Teatro Al Saeed has managed to sustain its activities and continue providing opportunities for emerging artists.

The need to build a network

Networking is crucial for the cultural and creative industries, Mostafa highlights, the connections made through events like the CREAT4MED kickoff have been instrumental in bringing trainers and collaborators to El Minya, enabling the success of initiatives like the Performing Arts Incubator. They contacted one influential actor in Egypt to collaborate in their initiatives. She was apprehensive, to begin with, he says, but once they established trust and a common belief in the importance of the activities, she is now a trusted partner and has connected them with other key stakeholders. Without the network, they couldn't have launched the initiative, Mostafa explains.

Looking ahead with Teatro Al Saeed

Looking ahead, Mostafa sees tremendous growth potential for the creative and cultural industries in the Southern Mediterranean. He envisions increased international cooperation and more opportunities for emerging entrepreneurs. The booming success of recent performances at Teatro Al Saeed, including sold-out shows, underscores the vibrant future of the arts in El Minya and beyond.



JORDAN

Enchanted Strings: A Tale of Puppets World

Ban, the co-founder of Puppets World for the Development of Children, brings tales to life through her passion for puppetry and social change. With a deep love for storytelling, Ban tells us she embarked on a journey to share the beauty of art and puppetry, creating a unique space where every child feels seen and heard. Ban is an atypical character in the scene of the cultural and creative industries, graduating from Industrial Engineering, and discovering her passion for puppeteering by chance with a similar initiative. After a swift change in career, she became a puppeteer along with her co-founder Rami Bader, together launching their own Puppets World in Jordan in 2018.



Puppets World is the first and only company in Jordan that aims to educate children and raise their awareness of social, behavioural, emotional, and cultural issues through the interactive mobile puppet theatre. Being mobile, the theatre reaches remote communities and targets locals, refugees, and disabled children from 4 to 12 years of age, regardless of their regional background. The plays are performed by internationally certified puppeteers in a fun and enjoyable way using puppets with different shapes and colours, also translated into sign language. Through 700 shows reaching 70,000 children across Jordan, including locals, refugees, and disabled children, Puppets World brings joy and inspiration, fostering positive change in children's lives.

The Impact of CREAT4MED Support: Providing Opportunity and Promoting Social Inclusion

With financial support from CREAT4MED, Puppets World has expanded its reach to underserved areas, enriching performances with diverse cultural elements and teaching children about their own traditional customs and foods. They reached a total of 482 children with the 10 workshops implemented with CREAT4MED. The support allowed them to elevate the quality of their performances by purchasing audiovisual equipment and developing 2 new puppet show scripts. They were also able to enhance the performances for children with disabilities, with over 200 enjoying their shows. By actively promoting social inclusion and integration, Puppets World has broken barriers that might otherwise limit underserved children's access to such valuable experiences.

Puppets World's Key Successes and Crucial Partnerships

To be successful, Ban emphasized the importance of networking. She noted that CREAT4MED has supported Puppets World to forge connections across the Mediterranean, collaborating with organizations like Teatro Al

Saeed from Egypt and from Askadar for Culture and Arts in Palestine. They're now poised to expand globally, engaging event planners and agencies in the Arab region for future performances. They're ready to build on key successes such as receiving the CREAT4MED Best Practice Award in Jordan and nominations for the Tandem Award (an EU-funded competition) and the Austrian Intercultural Achievement Award in 2022. With audiences spanning over 90 nationalities, Puppets World embodies the team's passion and commitment to delivering high-quality performances.



Guiding Aspirations: Ban's Advice to Entrepreneurs

Ban exudes passion and positivity in her work, and she strongly encourages aspiring entrepreneurs to nurture these qualities as well. Open yourself up to new experiences, she inspires, "puppeteering changed my personality". Every day she sees new opportunities and new ways to make a difference in the lives of the children she performs to. Believing in yourself is another crucial element of being an entrepreneur. Ban wakes up every day by saying "you can do this", just as she's done "this" before hundreds of times: build and grow her business and change the lives of children. Puppets World is not just a puppetry enterprise; it offers stories of hope, happiness and inspiration, changing lives one performance at a time.

Achievements with CREAT4MED - Puppets World

- 12 jobs created with 5 more anticipated
- Held 10 workshops with 2 new scripts
- Engaged 482 children including over 200 with disabilities



Stepping towards tradition through Gioia Footwear



The journey into the creative and cultural industry for many begins in unexpected ways, and the story behind Gioia is no different. It all started during a journalism career in Jordan, covering diverse stories for international TV channels, including visits to underprivileged communities and refugee camps. In 2018, a chance encounter with a talented woman in a refugee camp skilled in traditional embroidery sparked an idea. Inspired by a pair of overpriced shoes seen at a mall in Dubai, the founder, Farah Ajlouni, began sketching and crafting shoe prototypes just for fun. Encouraged by friends' interest, the opportunity to merge a passion for design with the artisan's talent became clear, leading to the creation of unique footwear. Despite initial challenges in finding a manufacturer, Gioia was born, bridging traditional craftsmanship with contemporary style.

Heritage Revived: Gioia's Modern Embroidered Footwear

By collaborating with skilled artisans, Gioia preserves traditional embroidery techniques while infusing them into stylish, modern shoe designs. This project has a significant impact on the creative and cultural industry by revitalising traditional crafts, empowering artisans with sustainable income opportunities, and fostering cross-cultural appreciation through wearable art. Through Gioia, unique and high-quality footwear is offered, contributing to heritage preservation and the empowerment of women.



With the CREAT4MED subgrant, Gioia leveraged a new cross-border business model between Jordan and Portugal, enhancing shoe quality while preserving traditional craftsmanship in Jordan. Collaborating with Jordanian, Palestinian, and Syrian artisans, the company addressed the rising global demand for their shoes, particularly in Europe. This grant enabled experimentation with this innovative model, despite initial challenges. A streamlined business approach was successfully implemented, Farah explains, including new designs aligned with current trends, standard operating procedures, brand and website enhancements, and establishing several connections with Portuguese manufacturers to outsource production and level up to global brands. This project culminated in the launch of an ongoing crowdfunding campaign.

Biggest Achievement and Overcoming the Odds

Farah explains that her most fulfilling achievement is the establishment of Gioia itself. However, she attributes its success to a number of factors including the unwavering dedication of the talented artisans, the support of friends and mentors who believed in the project, and the invaluable lessons learned from challenges and setbacks along the way. It has truly been a collective effort, she says, contributing to something meaningful.

That's not to say that Gioia has been a walk in the park! There is a lack of government support and investment in the creative and cultural industries in the Southern Mediterranean. With sectors like healthcare and education taking precedence, she explains, securing support and funding for creative ventures can be particularly daunting. The creative industry often faces scepticism, as it's perceived as secondary to more essential sectors. However, for those who appreciate its value, the creative industry holds immense significance. Despite these obstacles, the CREAT4MED grant has provided support in overcoming these challenges. It has offered the opportunity to transform tentative ideas into tangible plans and experiment with new endeavours. This grant has enabled Gioia to navigate the risks inherent in creative ventures and pursue innovative projects that have the potential to make a significant impact.

Networks play a pivotal role, providing access to resources, opportunities, and expertise, facilitating growth and fostering resilience. Additionally, networks serve as a support system, offering encouragement and mentorship during the highs and lows of entrepreneurship. Cultivating and leveraging networks is vital in navigating the highly competitive creative and cultural sectors and achieving sustained success.

Achievements with CREAT4MED - GIOIA

- 12 jobs created with a plan to create 12 more
- Enhanced their website and launched their “lookbook”
- Launched their crowdfunding campaign
- 25 prototypes launched

Farah’s Advice for Aspiring Entrepreneurs



Entering the creative and cultural sectors requires a mindset shift away from solely chasing financial gain, Farah advises. Instead, focus on selling the passion, inspiration, and creativity inherent in the work, as these intangible qualities can attract dedicated followers and customers. Be prepared for numerous challenges along the way, understanding that financial success may take years of hard work.

As founder of Gioia, Farah envisions a vibrant future for the creative and cultural industries in the Southern Mediterranean, filled with opportunities for emerging entrepreneurs. She highlights the Mediterranean’s unique blend of traditional craftsmanship and contemporary design and Gioia’s

capacity to represent the potential of the region to innovate and captivate global audiences. Acknowledging the global shift in technology and the environmental crisis, she believes that by embracing sustainability, ethical practices, and digital innovation, the cultural and creative industries in the region can position themselves at the forefront of the creative economy, driving positive social and economic change while preserving their cultural legacy for generations to come.



Harnessing Technology for Cultural Enrichment: The Story of ViaVii



Meet Rola Fayyad, the founder of ViaVii. A platform that uses technology to enhance travel experiences, making them more personal and culturally enriching. The impact of ViaVii on the creative and cultural industries has been profound, creating authentic tourism experiences that respect and celebrate local heritage. This approach drives sustainable cultural and economic growth, benefiting both travellers and local communities.

ViaVii's mission is to create meaningful connections between travellers and local cultures. By providing authentic tourism experiences, ViaVii celebrates local traditions and ways of life, fostering cross-cultural appreciation and economic sustainability. The platform empowers local hosts, particularly women, by providing them with the tools and resources to showcase their services effectively. This empowerment leads to increased visibility and revenue for local communities, contributing to the preservation of cultural heritage.

ViaVii's Capacity Building Activities with CREAT4MED

The CREAT4MED subgrant and training have been instrumental in ViaVii's growth. With the resources provided, ViaVii expanded its services and enhanced its operational capabilities. The support also enabled the development of a localized training curriculum in Arabic, boosting the skills of local women hosts and creating websites that effectively showcase their services and to ensure accessibility and relevance for their audience, supporting the region's unique cultural and business landscape. This initiative has driven both visibility and revenue, aligning with ViaVii's mission of sustainable cultural and economic growth.

Achievements with CREAT4MED - ViaVii

- 2 jobs created
- Attended 2 key summits pitching to an audience of over 1000 and fostering potential partnerships with over 50 clients
- Launched 21 new experiences
- Trained 10 experience providers

The ViaVii team also attended 2 mega travel and startup events during the subgrant timeline: the Web Summit in Lisbon resulting in connections with 50+ potential clients, investors, and partners, and the World Travel Market, London where Viavii, pitched to an audience of over 1000, establishing significant industry connections including GetYourGuide and Amadeus, enhancing brand visibility and fostering key partnerships.

Supporting Sustainable Tourism – a key achievement by ViaVii

One of Rola’s proudest achievements is the integration of sustainable tourism practices into ViaVii, which has been recognized internationally at forums like the UN Tourism Assembly. This success is attributed to the team’s commitment to utilizing technology to create meaningful connections between visitors and local cultures. This approach has not only enhanced the travel experience but has also positively impacted local economies by promoting sustainable tourism practices.

Challenges in launching a digital tourism start-up

Navigating the effects of regional instability and external shocks has been a significant challenge for ViaVii. However, the flexible support from CREAT4MED has enabled the company to adapt its financial and operational strategies to ensure the continuity and safety of its projects and team. This adaptability has been key to sustaining ViaVii’s initiatives during challenging times, allowing the company to continue its mission of cultural enrichment and economic empowerment.



Rola’s advice to make it as an entrepreneur

Success as an entrepreneur in the creative and cultural sectors requires perseverance, adaptability, and cultural intelligence. Networking is incredibly valuable, providing dynamic support, facilitating learning, and opening doors to new opportunities. Rola believes that her visionary approach and ability to navigate cultural sensitivities have been crucial to her success. For those looking to enter the creative and cultural sectors, understanding and prioritising cultural sensitivities is essential. Offering products or services that respect and celebrate local traditions can create deeper connections with the community and drive long-term success. Aspiring entrepreneurs should focus on the passion and creativity inherent in their work, rather than solely chasing financial gain.



Talaween: providing access to soft skills in Jordan's young population



Talaween is an interactive application that uses both digital and physical art activities to teach children the necessary soft skills needed to succeed in the 21st century. It provides interactive and comprehensive educational tools for teaching soft skills to children and adolescents through art, using engaging educational curricula written by specialists and converted into artistic exercises. Talaween was founded by Lina Abojaradeh in 2021. Lina is an established and award-winning artist, whose work uses storytelling to address issues of social, religious and racial injustice.

Talaween's journey connecting art, upskilling and employability

Lina's journey with Talaween started in 2014 with her social enterprise, Archismile. Archismile engages youth through art to increase creativity, self-awareness and community participation. It has impacted over 7000 school children, 150 youth volunteers, and 1000 young people who have disabilities or are refugees. Through this work, Lina recognised a significant gap in soft skills in Jordan and its education system. Unemployment is one of the most pressing issues facing Jordanian youth today, Lina explains. Over one-third of those between the ages of 15 and 30 are unemployed in Jordan. The skills gap can be attributed to the lack of activities and opportunities supporting development, whether due to a rigid educational system, or the increasing dependence on technol-

ogy. Additionally, most soft skills training targets adults meaning children's and young people's soft skills are neglected. According to numerous studies, children's screen time averages around 7 hours per day, she says. Now more than ever, there is a need for digital content that supports children's development.

To fill this need, Lina launched Talaween. In her training curricula, Lina focuses on 6 skills:

- Self-confidence (Identity, Tolerance of difference, Self-perception, Affirmations)
- Future planning (Time Management, Values, Dreams, goal setting, overcoming fears)
- Creativity (Creative thinking, Innovation, Imagination, growth mindset)
- Emotional Intelligence (Self-awareness, Mind and Body connection, Balance, Emotions vs Feeling, Managing Anger)
- 21st Century Skills (Entrepreneurship, Financial literacy, Digital Literacy)
- Interpersonal Skills (Team Work, Leadership, Communication)

The CREAT4MED subgrant allowed Lina to research this skills gap further to ensure Talaween was addressing a real need that could be marketed to consumers effectively. From there, Lina and her team began working on the Talaween mobile application to ensure accessibility and started working with schools and education providers to expand her network and consumer base. Lina continues to develop the application and her curricula to ensure more children and youth have access to her invaluable educational tool.



Achievements with CREAT4MED - Talaween

- **Developed the Talaween mobile application**
- **Enhanced the Talaween training curricula**
- **Created marketing and communication content to launch the Talaween mobile app**

LEBANON

Reimagining Waste: Cezar's Projects' Artful Eco-Tourism

Cezar's Projects is a youthful rural development initiative based in Mount Lebanon that launched as a social enterprise since 2017. The enterprise is developing standard rural-tourism operations and coordinating rural initiatives, to promote sustainability through retaining local talents, creating innovation in sustainable tourism and generating new sources of income. Cezar's Projects' message is spreading, and it is now acting as a facilitator for developing sustainable initiatives in Chouf villages and managing different local experiences and facilities. All of which have created around 74 direct job opportunities as well as made a remarkable economic and social impact in the local community. Cezar's Guest House and other initiatives seek to promote authentic experiences of the area, collaborating with local elders and farmers to promote sustainability.

Achievements with CREAT4MED – Cezar's Projects

- Launched the Waste to Art Project
- Trained 21 women over 10 workshops
- 5 collaboration agreements signed
- Launched a communication campaign

Over the last year working with the CREAT4MED subgrant, Cezar's Projects developed a hub located in Farmville Barouk (a project owned and managed by "Cezar's Projects"), Carmen Bou Dargham, Cezar's Projects' Community Development Facilitator tells us. They equipped the space with sewing machines, threads, and other mate-

rials to launch 10 workshops for 21 women in the local area to learn skills in crocheting and sewing to produce innovative, unique and creative products to sell to Cezar's Projects visitors. Their project was called Waste to Art and had the key aim of reusing materials such as old fabrics, plastics, etc. and transforming "waste" into something new using local women's handicraft skills. To do so, they signed 5 collaboration agreements with local suppliers to collect and buy waste from. Finally, to raise awareness of the products, the skills and value of the workers, and the circular economy aspect of the products, they launched a communication campaign and developed the initiative's identity. These efforts have culminated in the creation of Farmville Barouk Creations that are now available in their physical shops that will be officially launched this year.

Cezar’s Projects’ Impact in Mount Lebanon

Carmen explains the impact their activities have had on the local community. Joining the initiative in 2018 after graduating from a degree in sustainable tourism, Carmen saw the immense potential of her region and wanted to join the efforts to promote it for international visitors and Lebanese tourists alike. Over their various initiatives such as Farmville Barouk, Cezar’s Guest House, and others, their team has grown to over 50 members



which has enabled young people in the area to work locally rather than migrating to urban areas or abroad. In Carmen’s words, “we’ve become industry leaders, attracting people who come to learn from us and making a significant impact on the community.”

Cezar’s Projects holds a variety of cultural events at the farm, including art studio sessions, poetry, crochet, and arts, fostering community and cultural exchange between visitors and local artisans. The team hosts a weekly schedule of workshops with around 15 attendees per class, catering to different age groups. The initiative targets two main markets: residents who benefit from the art studio as a space for fun and learning, and visitors, often families from urban areas in Lebanon. They are also connecting with schools, with up to 70 children attending pottery workshops.

Overcoming the fluctuating tourism industry

According to Carmen, one of the biggest challenges they had to deal with was the financial crisis in Lebanon, which had a major impact on their financial processes. Like many other MSMEs in Lebanon, they simply had to adapt to a cash-based system and look for ways to make their services accessible to their consumers. Due to the crisis, they also experienced a shift in their customers from international to domestic tourism. Instead of young backpackers arriving to Mount Lebanon, they found they had to cater to young families looking for different kinds of activities. This required the team to adjust their strategies.

Over the past six years, creativity and adaptability have been crucial, Carmen says. They see that in order to succeed in any business, collaboration is essential, both within the community and with suppliers and marketplaces.

For Cezar’s Projects’ success, they continually enhance their models through grants but strive for sustainability beyond grant reliance. The Waste to Art project exemplifies successful collaboration with their local community and sustainability due to fostering partnerships with local suppliers.





Carmen's advice for aspiring eco-tourism entrepreneurs

Carmen shared that in order to succeed as an entrepreneur in the creative and cultural sector, you need to draw inspiration from your culture and create something that reflects your identity. Be passionate about preserving and promoting your culture and keep the community engaged throughout the process. She believes this is why they have had great success at Cezar's Projects: they leverage their shared passion for their natural environment and raise awareness among visitors about the value of slow tourism and eco-experiences over flashy consumerism. Carmen sees that creative and cultural industries have a very bright future, especially with the new generation of innovators among young people in the South. It's crucial to keep these innovators encouraged and supported, both financially and non-financially.



Sole Mates: Strengthening ClimberSpace’s Community



Jad Issa and his two brothers, co-founders of ClimberSpace, set out to transform climbing culture in Lebanon and the Middle East. They are three passionate climbers who, during their years of climbing, realised that everything they consumed came from outside Lebanon. There was nothing that truly represented their culture. Thus, their vision was born: to create a brand that would embody and celebrate the Middle Eastern climbing community. Living in the mountains, climbing strengthened the brothers’ connection with nature and to their cultural heritage.

Getting Certified: the Vibram Cobbler Training

CREACT4MED’s financial support and training opportunities have played an essential role in the development and success of ClimberSpace. Thanks to CREAT4MED’s support, ClimberSpace was able to modernise its workshop and the space itself to allow them to work towards meeting the requirements for Vibram Cobbler certification. This certification, issued by the world’s largest insole manufacturer, brought great credibility and has made ClimberSpace the first and only certified shoemaker in the Middle East.

Achievements with CREAT4MED - ClimberSpace

- 6 jobs created
- Obtained the Vibram Cobbler certification
- 3 business partnerships made in UAE, Jordan and Egypt
- Launched their website and online store
- Growth of SpaceFest

This achievement not only strengthened their reputation, but also enabled them to become part of a global network, accessing training and support from Italy. Jad travelled to Italy to take part in numerous training sessions, providing him with the skills needed to fully repair climbing shoes and impart this knowledge to the ClimberSpace team.

In addition, the funding enabled ClimberSpace to improve their online presence, reach new markets in Egypt and Dubai, and expand their team by hiring additional shoemakers and salespeople. This growth has enabled them to forge key partnerships with climbing gyms across the region, making it easier to repair climbing shoes and sell their products internationally.



ClimberSpace's Successes and Key Partnerships

Success in the creative and cultural sectors requires passion, authenticity and a strong link with the community. One of ClimberSpace's proudest achievements is the growth and success of its climbing festivals. From a small gathering in Lebanon, the festival has grown to attract up to 350 climbers from all over the world, including countries such as Mexico and Norway. The event has become the cornerstone of the climbing community in the region, fostering contacts and promoting cultural exchange. In addition, these partnerships have facilitated the creation of a network where climbers from different countries can share their experiences and support each other, reinforcing the sense of community that ClimberSpace aims to promote.

Guiding aspirations: Jad's advice to entrepreneurs

Jad believes that success in the creative and cultural sectors hinges on a few essential qualities. Entrepreneurs must be passionate about their work and willing to take risks. It's essential to remain authentic and connected to the community, and to be open to new ideas and collaborations. Building a strong network is also essential, as it can provide the support and opportunities needed for growth. Jad advises budding entrepreneurs to stay true to their vision while adapting to changes and challenges. He stresses the importance of creating a brand that not only stands out, but also resonates with the community and culture it represents.

ClimberSpace's journey is a testament to the impact that passion, perseverance and strategic partnerships can have on the creative and cultural industries. As it continues to grow and inspire, ClimberSpace is committed to promoting climbing and cultural exchange, bridging gaps and reaching new heights.



Beyond the Screen: VFX Expertise with Mlouk Productions

Mlouk Productions is a film production company based in Lebanon equipped with professional resources and a creative team that is ready to bring inspiring stories to life. Mlouk forges the creative and the production processes to offer optimised workflows tailor-made to every project. They cover the whole journey of a project, from the idea creation and elaboration to script writing, production and post-production. They produce cinema, entertainment, corporate and promotional videos with a vision to explore and share humanity through stories.



With CREAT4MED, Mlouk Productions launched the first version of their VFX (visual effects) Learning Programme, designed to provide an introduction of VFX to passionate graduates interested in the career. The program started with an introduction to the creative and production workflow, providing learners with a comprehensive overview of VFX production. This understanding

prepared the way for learning the general VFX workflow and how it's implemented in the whole production pipeline. After grasping the fundamentals, the learners were guided to choose between one of the following topics to learn more in depth: compositing, modelling or animation. This customisation empowered students to align their learning path with their personal preferences and career aspirations. Personalised sessions were held by the Mlouk team with each learner in order to advance in their learning/creating process. The program was adapted to every student, respecting their pace and their learning goals, while orienting them to what's best for their career and learning journey.

Achievements with CREAT4MED – MLOUK PRODUCTIONS

- 1 job created and 3 jobs supported
- Launched their VFX learning programme with 4 students
- Collaborated with 4 universities and 1 NGO

The VFX Learning Program has had an enormously positive impact, with a focus on education, diversity, and technological advancement. It plays a vital role in skill development for students interested in VFX design, fostering creativity and expertise in a dynamic field. The funding from CREAT4MED was pivotal to this success as it allowed for the purchase of equipment for the training, including new hardware and a server, enhancing technological capabilities in VFX production.



Tourific Transformations: Innovating Entertainment and Tourism in Lebanon



Meet Bilal Zahalan, a 24-year-old entrepreneur who started his journey 4 years ago in the creative and cultural industries. With a passion for gaming, data and innovation, Bilal came up with his project idea, Tourific, during the COVID-19 pandemic. Tourific is a marketplace for self-guided audio and augmented reality tours, where tour guides can create their tours on the Tourific platform and share their experiences and knowledge for tourists to purchase and enjoy.

During the pandemic, Bilal took the time to test his idea, develop it, and get feedback until it was ready to launch. After doing some initial research, he found that the tourism industry in Lebanon was in decline but had enormous potential. Searching for contacts and common ground, he built connections online and started to strengthen the idea for his business in the tourism and entertainment industry.

Achievements with CREAT4MED – TOURIFIC

- 5 new jobs created with 12 more planned
- Launched their MVP and marketing strategy
- Research trip to Egypt revealing new distribution channels and partnerships opportunities, notably in the travel and telecom sectors.
- Acceptance into Techstars Pre-Accelerator
- Cooperation with the Lebanese Ministry of Culture
- 11 tours finalised and ready for publication

The impact of CREAT4MED on Tourific's journey

After the pandemic, Tourific was ready for the next step. Selected to be part of the CREAT4MED project, the company immensely benefited from the financial support which accelerated the development process of Tourific and proving the concept. It also allowed Bilal to travel to Egypt to carry out research and continue building his network. This exploration was invaluable, revealing new distribution channels and partnership opportunities, notably in the travel and telecom sectors.

The knowledge and mentoring experiences gained from the program have been invaluable, Bilal explains, contributing significantly to Tourific's growth and strategic direction. So much so that Tourific has been accepted into the TechStars Global Startup Network. Techstars is a pre-seed investor that provides access to capital, mentorship, and other support for early-stage entrepreneurs. They are ranked number 2 globally with an acceptance rate of 3%. This has allowed them to connect with key investors for long-term financial sustainability. The support provided through CREAT4MED was a key stepping stone to this achievement as it provided structure to the company and allowed them to reach initial key milestones.



The winding road to success

Before joining CREAT4MED, Bilal was facing challenges trying to develop the platform both on iOS and Android, and with a limited budget, he felt like this was impossible to achieve until he received technical support from the coaches and financial support from CREAT4MED. From there, he was able to hire the needed expertise and compose the perfect formula to advance his dream.

“As an entrepreneur, you need to be consistent. Improving 1% every day means improving 365% every year. For this, money is not the goal. You need to be run by purpose and show up every day.”
- Bilal Zahalan, Founder and CEO, Tourific

According to Bilal, his biggest achievement was being a young entrepreneur, building two companies. However, for every aspiring entrepreneur, there will always be challenges along the way. Communication with stakeholders was one of them for Bilal, as he explained that some stakeholders simply don't see the value in what you are doing,

and this can set you back. Another challenge was the financial issues in Lebanon; it took them 9 months to identify a payment process, given that Lebanon essentially transformed into a cash-based economy. For a company in the tech industry, this was a huge obstacle to tackle.

What's next for Tourific and innovation in the Mediterranean?

Bilal anticipates a digitised future and tourism industry in Lebanon and across the region. Across the world, we are experiencing social and environmental crises, he says. To ensure Tourific stays ahead of the curve and has a positive impact on the ecosystem, one of the key initiatives in the pipeline after raising funds is the integration of blockchain technology into the platform. Specifically, he aims to host the app on the Ethereum blockchain, which is expected to reduce its carbon footprint by over 99.99%. Continuing to create and innovate, Tourific has a big adventure coming, and Bilal is ready to be a disruptor in the tourism industry in the region.



MOROCCO

Tradition in the Making: Moroccan Leather and Calligraphy with Cré Artisanat

Meet Wafae Zaoui, artisan and painter calligrapher. Six years ago, Wafae, following her passion, started the brand Bill Yadi **يدي لياب**, which means “handmade” in Arabic. She then launched Cré Artisanat, the start-up that offers a range of handmade leather goods and accessories that meet both professional and everyday uses. The products elaborated at Cré Artisanat have an aesthetic, creative and singular purpose and are different from a standardised mass production market.

With many years of experience as an artisan and entrepreneur, Wafae feels she is incredibly fortunate as she has found her passion and was able to convert it into a profitable project. Cré Artisanat, the fruit of Wafae’s hard work, began by selling handmade products. The idea was based on slow production, rooted in local customs and traditions, yet open to the world and people’s needs.



The project didn’t limit itself to handmade products but also includes holding workshops and training others in leatherwork, a practice that began a few years ago with Bill Yadi. Wafae led these sessions, which she considered a win-win for everyone involved, as she got to teach and meet people, growing her skills and network, whilst others had the chance to explore their creativity and learn something new. Teaching others eventually led Wafae to learn from these interactions, gaining insights into the lack of knowledge about the leatherwork industry and

her potential impact. With transparency and giving credit to behind-the-scenes artisans, Wafae set up her values and kept the boat sailing. Her approach was to give people the experience of the entire process so they would understand and value the work more deeply, a process that typically requires 4-6 sessions or sometimes more.

Achievements with CREAT4MED – Cré Artisanat

- 4 new jobs created
- 700 pieces sold under the Bill Yadi brand
- Workshop space enhanced
- Website launched

CREACT4MED supporting Cré Artisanat’s creativity and growth

With CREAT4MED, Cré Artisanat aimed to enhance their workshop space to be able to create new designs and scale their production in order to cater for an international market interested in handmade craftsmanship. To ensure strong revenues from their products, Cré Artisanat also invested in their communication and branding, developing their website and creating a new visual identity.

To begin with, Wafae was apprehensive about expanding her team, however, she quickly realised that with such ambition, Cré Artisanat must grow, and with CREAT4MED backing, she felt confident to do so. So, in 2023, Wafae hired 4 new people for the positions of a manager & designer for 6 months, an artisan assistant for 5 months, and a communication and branding manager for 4 months. The new team made it possible for Cré Artisanat to produce 700 pieces and create a new collection during the CREAT4MED project.

Wafae was also able to establish new partnerships with other artisans, such as Achraf, a talented leatherwork artisan working as a freelancer, who joined the team in December 2023. Since joining, Achraf has become an integral part of the professional network and artisans' community. Through such a collaboration, Wafae aims not only to increase production output but also to showcase Achraf's talent and craftsmanship.



Dealing with informality and Wafae's role in promoting artisan's visibility

One of the biggest achievements Wafae shared is fighting for the visibility of artisans and practising her own work. Even though it's more challenging now than before, getting the chance to learn over the years and mastering art was a huge achievement.

“ My surroundings, particularly my network, were crucial for my success. Seeing the results and the impact on everyone makes it all worth it!”

The main challenge Wafae faces is the lack of infrastructure in the cultural and creative industries in Morocco. An ecosystem exists, she says, but not in any formal way. Freelancers and suppliers often lack legal status, making transparency difficult. Additionally, societal challenges, such as how people perceive artisans, were significant. She found that their work is not valued enough, and people often prefer easy, fast ways to buy products that are not ethical or handmade.

Balancing tradition with innovation

For Wafae, success in this field first requires understanding that the profession is challenging. The cultural sector is one of the most difficult because you must be loyal to your country’s culture while also creating something new and profitable, she explains. Balancing these aspects doesn’t happen overnight; it requires time and patience. You need to experiment and take risks. It’s okay for it to take time as long as you are engaged and motivated for it to work. When talking about the future, Wafae recognises that roles are changing for small artisans in the Arab world. It’s taking a new turn, but it’s not enough yet. As much as it is trying to be more structured and formal, artisans should not be afraid to ask for more—not necessarily more help but more value.

In terms of what’s next for Cré Artisanat, Wafae is looking for bigger and brighter. The last two years launching the company have been difficult, she acknowledges, but she has learned immensely from these experiences and knows this is the best way to know how to go further. In the coming years, Wafae hopes to expand either with employees or trainees, especially young people, to show them that it’s possible to have a career as an artisan. The workshops are a truly valuable part of the business and Wafae is capitalising on them to build partnerships across Morocco. It’s a key way to spread the word, she says, and eventually bring more international interest to the work. Being part of the international community, including the EU community of entrepreneurs in Morocco, is a great prospect for Cré Artisanat as it allows her to network and play an active role in the ecosystem.



Match Made in Heaven: Help Mariage Bringing Wedding Dreams to Reality

Help Mariage is the first mobile application for planning a serene wedding in Morocco. They have a large-scale network of over 1000 professionals working in 40 sectors in the creative and cultural wedding industry by enabling them to develop their business by digitizing their activity, connecting them with eager brides and grooms to make their day perfect. Lucie Strack, co-founder and of Help Mariage, has a rich background in the creative and cultural industry, having spent 12 years in fashion and five years in event management before founding Help Mariage. This innovative company operates as a mobile hub connecting wedding professionals with various partners, particularly focusing on Moroccan weddings, which can involve up to 30 different professions. Help Mariage aims to digitize and strengthen these small businesses by facilitating connections and providing resources.



Support from CREAT4MED: Time to Make My Day

Lucie's career began in France, working in one of the last factories producing traditional fabrics. However, seeking new opportunities, she relocated to Morocco. In Morocco, she integrated local manufacturers with unique fabrics, facing initial challenges due to the reluctance of customers to purchase from France. She also organized fashion shows and corporate events, gradually expanding her influence.

To boost their business with CREAT4MED, Help Mariage officially launched their website and mobile application. They hired a freelance IT developer who built the website according to their needs and trained the Help Mariage team to use the site and continue its development and upload content. Secondly, to grow their client base and network of professionals, they elaborated a database of 1000 professionals and employed effective social media strategies to reach 33.5K followers on Instagram, with the help of their newly hired sales manager. Whilst Help Mariage is dedicated to ensuring clients get their dream wedding, they are also concerned with raising awareness of child marriage in Morocco. To that end, they partnered with “Project Soar”, a Moroccan association, and supported their petition against child marriage with the international initiative “Girls, not Brides”. In the future, Help Mariage hopes to financially contribute to this cause.

Whilst also having a strong community online, Lucie wanted to ensure Help Mariage was well established in the industry. They have done so by attending two key wedding fairs in Casablanca and Fes. They discovered that many attendees were already aware of their work, which only cemented their presence and impact further. To ensure face-to-face interaction with their clients and professionals, they opened up their new office space in the Technopark in Casablanca, adapting it to their brand ensuring style and professionalism. Finally, with the same aim, they also registered their brands, Make My Day, and Wedding Coach, with the Moroccan Industrial and Commercial Property Office.

Achievements with CREAT4MED – Help Mariage

- 1 job created and 1 job supported, with 2 more planned
- 1 website launched
- Created a database of 1000 professionals and a community of 33.5K
- Collaboration with “Project Soar” to petition against child marriage in Morocco
- Attended 2 wedding fairs
- Registered their brand with the Moroccan Industrial and Commercial Property Office
- Opened their office space in Casablanca’s Technopark

A Proud Achievement in Morocco

One of Lucie’s proudest achievements is launching a successful subsidiary in Morocco from scratch, achieving a turnover of 1,000,000 EUR within six years. This success was largely due to her ability to find and train local providers, ensuring the quality met international standards. She credits the involvement of stakeholders as a critical factor in this accomplishment.

Lucie believes that passion, resilience, adaptability, hard work, and creativity are essential qualities for success as an entrepreneur in the creative and cultural sectors. Networking is also crucial, as building a community and understanding the audience are vital for growth. She advises aspiring entrepreneurs to focus on digitalization and innovation, think strategically as a business, and take the leap into the industry.

Future Opportunities in the Southern Mediterranean

Looking ahead, Lucie sees immense potential in the creative and cultural industries of the Southern Mediterranean. These regions are rich in culture, heritage, and craftsmanship, and the younger generation has the potential to exploit these opportunities. There is a growing demand for ethical products and services, particularly in places like Marrakesh, where European-style weddings and eco-friendly services are gaining popularity. For Help Mariage, the future involves launching operations in Tunisia and potentially Jordan. They aim to create a fusion of cultures in the Southern Mediterranean, bringing traditions across borders. With a successful launch underway, Lucie is excited about the possibilities that lie ahead for her company and the wider industry.



Playful Spaces: HKids' Furniture for Little Dreamers

Meet Hiba, a 38-year-old mother of two from Marrakesh, Morocco, and CEO of HKids. With a passion for designing and creating new pieces, a trait she inherited from her father, a woodworker and carpenter, Hiba's journey into the creative and cultural industries began out of necessity. She needed an extra room for her daughter but couldn't find the furniture she wanted, so she decided to create it herself. Starting by selling an old bed in the marketplace, the overwhelming response revealed a significant gap in the market. This led Hiba to create six other beds, and in 2019, her first year as an entrepreneur, she achieved a turnover of 56,000 EUR. Inspired by this success, she established her company, HKIDS.



HKids is a company specialised in the manufacture of personalised children's furniture that is scalable and employs innovative solutions. At HKIDS they work on 4 values: i) the emotive: beautiful and comfortable furniture inspired by Moroccan design and culture; ii) innovation: innovative and unique design solutions; iii) safety: safe furniture for babies and young children; iv) social: services for families or associations that are in need, and exceptional prices for families with more than 3 children.

CREACT4MED's Impact on Hiba's Journey

HKids made a huge impact with the financial support provided by CREAT4MED. Being a furniture store, up until CREAT4MED HKids was operating online and with partnerships. Now, Hiba Ghiati has opened the first HKids store in a key department store in Marrakesh. To achieve this great effort, HKids employed 10 people in the timeline of the subgrant with plans to continue growing the team. Before, Hiba's team was made up of the production team, now they have administrative staff, management, designers, a community manager, a shop assistant, and two salespeople. This great expansion will ensure that HKids can fulfil new orders and continue to build their reputation. HKids also invested in developing their website, ensuring it has a sleek look to attract consumers and loaded it with the digital HKids catalogue, finalised after photoshoots of the products also financed by CREAT4MED. Establishing themselves as a key player and facilitator, HKids also developed partnerships with several other brands in Morocco and now display 4000 products, demonstrating their commitment to support other small businesses in the industry.

Achievements with CREAT4MED – HKids

- Two photoshoot sessions
- Website developed
- Digital catalogue developed
- 1 store opened

Hiba's Biggest Achievements

Hiba shared that she is incredibly proud to provide employment opportunities and stable jobs for people in her community. The HKids team includes members who have been working for three years, which they believe is a testament to the supportive work environment.

To achieve this, perseverance is key, she says. Entrepreneurs must find solutions to all problems and have unwavering belief in their products and their ability to succeed. Having a mission and values is crucial; it's not just about money but having a meaningful purpose behind your project.

“Showing my children how to build success and making my father proud by continuing his legacy in woodworking are deeply fulfilling accomplishments.”

Constructing HKids' Future

Hiba envisions HKids becoming a leader in kids' furniture. They are constantly innovating, including developing an application that reads stories to children at bedtime in voices they can choose. They will launch a subscription service that offers new books every month, and they will continue creating content that aligns with their values. From there, Hiba hopes to expand the business and open more stores in Morocco and internationally and to establish a factory dedicated solely to HKids products. The future holds exciting prospects!



Felicity Chocolat



Felicity is a chocolate boutique, an educational platform and a marketplace allowing master chocolate makers and producers in the network to develop their skills and sell their production, creations and training and consulting services, based in Morocco.

With CREAT4MED, Felicity was able to create 3 jobs to support them with the full cataloguing of their products. They were also able to develop their social media strategy and build relationships with their community, as well as key chocolatiers. Felicity was unfortunately unable to interview with us on this occasion.

PALESTINE

Artful Adventures: Askadar’s Creative Activities for Kids in Nablus

Askadar is a creative cultural centre in the city of Nablus in the West Bank. The centre opened its doors in March 2017 and has been providing much needed culture and arts activities to the children and teens (5 to 15 years old). Askadar was founded by a group of young artists and entrepreneurs with a goal of educating children in music and dance and giving them a safe, family-friendly environment for them to explore their creativity. Now, Askadar is engaging 150 students in art activities such as: ballet, dabka, music and drawing.

Founder and Managing Director, Hala Shakshir, explains how she started Askadar. “After completing my master’s in arts and philosophy in Berlin, I was deeply inspired by the institutions and theatres there, especially those focused on community-based initiatives. I realized that something like this was missing in Palestine, so we rented a small space and started Askadar.”



They began with some pilot classes and investigating whether there was a demand for this kind of activity. At first, engaging kids in dancing or theatre seemed a bit “crazy,” but the excitement grew, she says. Starting with small groups of children, they now have five classrooms and one dedicated dance classroom. The project started at a pivotal moment when social media, especially TikTok, was booming. This platform helped Hala align Askadar with an international mindset, connecting young girls, as young as 9 or 10, with global movements. In Nablus, while sports are available, movement and art activities are rare, primarily due to the lack of funding for arts. Askadar space fills this gap, offering children experiences they wouldn’t otherwise have. “Schools initially didn’t take us seriously, but now they call us to perform at graduations, recognizing our role in the community. We’ve become an essential part of the cultural ecosystem in Nablus” Hala explains.

CREACT4MED allowed Askadar to open its doors to the children of Nablus to participate in their Summer School. CREAT4MED created the opportunity for kids to register and to have an experience of everything that Askadar provides such as classes in dancing, singing, painting, and playing several musical instruments. They were able to do so by hiring 6 new workshop leaders,

Achievements with CREAT4MED – ASKADAR

- **6 jobs created**
- **New musical instruments purchased**
- **Networking with toy manufacturer in Istanbul**
- **Plans for the second Summer School in 2024**

purchasing more equipment, and renovating some of their classrooms. These improvements mean the children can try and select any activity they wish, whereas before, they were limited to the number of classes they could take. Due to the implementation of CREAT4MED, Askadar has seen a great increase in interest and registrations for the Summer School, meaning they are able to hold a second edition starting June 2024.

Furthermore, following attendance at a toy fair in Istanbul, Askadar are also working with a toy manufacturer based there to discuss the possibility of purchasing further equipment for the children outside class times to enhance their enjoyment and overall experience at the Summer School.

Reviving Nablus

One Hala's proudest achievements is their move from a small apartment to a beautifully renovated Ottoman palace. "Everyone thought I was crazy for taking on such a difficult and expensive project" she says, but she believed that the beauty of the palace would help Askadar to grow and provide real inspiration and connection for the kids involved. The renovation took a lot of time and money, but it earned their initiative respect and reinforced their ambition.

Hala also discussed the difficulties of managing a cultural and creative enterprise in Palestine. There's no predicting what will happen she says, and in emergencies, cultural activities are seen as non-essential. This lack of support and mobility constraints, especially when trying to expand to places like Ramallah, pose significant hurdles. "CREACT4MED has helped us navigate some of these challenges by providing stability and opportunities to continue our work in Nablus despite these uncertainties."

Take the opportunities that come

When asked to give advice to aspiring creatives, Hala says seizing opportunities quickly is crucial. "Sometimes we see opportunities but hesitate too long, and they slip away. Being quick and taking advantage of the "golden moments" can make a significant difference." She also emphasises that building a network is equally important. Networking ensures you are not isolated and helps you find support and collaboration opportunities. Hala sees such opportunity for Askadar in the future as digitalisation and new tools make their way to Nablus. She believes that the metaverse and other technological advancements will open new avenues for creativity and culture.



Handmade Palestine: Supporting Artisans Across Palestine

Handmade Palestine, located in Ramallah, Palestine, is truly a labour of love to bring the best of Palestinian handicrafts to international markets while supporting over 30 Palestinian artisans, cooperatives & designers in their creative journey. With the profits made, Handmade Palestine plants native trees in the local area, demonstrating their commitment to having a positive impact on the environment.

Achievements with CREAT4MED – Handmade Palestine

- 13 jobs created
- Supported 5 artisans with disabilities to showcase their work and products
- Community strengthened with over 700 newsletter subscribers
- Website enhanced powered by Shopify for international sales

With CREAT4MED, Handmade Palestine strengthened their processes and network in or to internationalise the company for European and Gulf buyers. They also invested the funds in developing and implementing a creative communications strategy that focuses on storytelling and cultural heritage preservation. In doing so, they now have over 700 newsletter subscribers, a website powered by Shopify allowing them to sell internation-

ally, and an updated catalogue showcasing the artisan’s work. As well as boosting community building online, Handmade Palestine also focused on their stakeholders locally by holding a capacity building activity on kitting and product design with 5 artisans with disabilities, partnering with the Oasis Center. This year Handmade Palestine has grown hugely thanks to the successful communication strategy.

◆ HANDMADE ◆
PALESTINE



Meera Adnan: Unisex Contemporary RTW Clothing Label from Gaza

MEERA ADNAN is a Palestinian contemporary clothing and accessories label from Gaza City. Their work focuses on reclaiming narrative and is influenced by religious, political, and local references that create a romantic and nostalgic visual monologue. Meera Adnan was founded and is led by CEO Meera Albaba. Unfortunately, due to the ongoing war in Gaza, Meera Adnan could not proceed with the implementation of the CREAT4MED sub-grant. We continue to support her in whatever way we can.

ميراعادن
Meera Adnan



TUNISIA

KLINK: Revolutionising Artist Booking and Production



Sherazade Amous, the CEO of KLINK.TN, and a seasoned musician, has carved a unique path in the creative and cultural industry. Graduating from the Higher Institute of Music in Tunis, she brings ten years of invaluable experience in the events sector to her entrepreneurial venture. KLINK.TN stands as a revolutionary digital platform, specializing in artist booking and production. Sherazade and her team are on a mission to bridge the gap between musicians and event organizers, whether they are companies, individuals, festivals, or concert halls. The platform serves as a vital tool for musicians to promote their work, structure their careers, and gain visibility in the international market, thereby opening doors to new professional opportunities.

The Impact of CREAT4MED: Taking KLINK International

The CREAT4MED subgrant and training have played a pivotal role in Sherazade's journey. The program's support came at a crucial time, aligning with her internationalisation strategy. It enabled her to dedicate resources to the digital development of KLINK Fest, a collaboration with software company COMGURU, to streamline artist registration and profile creation. She could also make a strategic investment in dedicated hardware, empowering her Commercial Officer to be agile and seamlessly integrate with the KLINK team. The meticulous compilation of a diverse artist database formed the bedrock for prospecting and contract negotiations. Leveraging these enhanced resources, Sherazade was able to establish agreements with international artists and solidify a partnership with a respected French label. Their extensive festival research culminated in the successful booking of an artist for the renowned International Hammamet Festival.

Overcoming Challenges with Resilience

Sherazade reflects on the challenges faced in the creative and cultural industries, highlighting mentality and funding as primary hurdles. Despite these challenges, KLINK has demonstrated resilience and adaptability, especially during the onset of the pandemic. Sherazade swiftly adjusted the business model, introducing an instant ticketing system for online concerts, ensuring the platform’s relevance and sustainability.

Achievements with CREAT4MED – KLINK

- 3 new jobs created with 4 more expected
- Launch of KLINK Fest
- Partnership with a French label secured and first artist booked at the International Hammamet Festival using the platform
- 4 artists signed

Sherazade’s Take on Qualities for Entrepreneurial Success

Sherazade emphasises the importance of vision, determination, creativity, resilience, and adaptability for success in the creative and cultural sectors. She also underscores the significance of networks in an entrepreneur’s journey, emphasizing the need for continuous learning and passion for the cause. At KLINK, strategic networking with festival program coordinators bolstered her industry presence and ultimately secured the signing of her first international artist.

“To choose a cause that’s close to their hearts, because that’s the only way to keep going, and above all to never stop learning and listening.” - Sherazade Amous, Founder & CEO, KLINK

KLINK’s next steps in the industry

Looking ahead, Sherazade envisions a bright future for the creative and cultural industries and KLINK’s place within the ecosystem. She sees ample opportunity networking, exchange, and strengthening partnerships as they continue to develop their platform to enhance the music scene in Africa and promote Southern Mediterranean and African artists. Alongside this, Sherazade will prioritise KLINK’s financial sustainability by leveraging her growing network to attract partnerships and sponsorships from industry players, fostering collaborations with complementary brands or events for financial support and cross-promotion. These investments align with KLINK’s mission of nurturing talent and fostering creative communities. By deepening involvement in cultural initiatives, such as sponsoring artist residencies and collaborating with festivals, KLINK both enriches the cultural landscape and supports artists carve their own path through the industry.



Digital Cultural eXperience: Bringing education, technology and cultural heritage together



Digital Cultural eXperience (DCX) believes that promoting heritage among young people is a key factor in building a prosperous and peaceful society. Their goal is to create attractive platforms and XR experiences that (re)connect young people with their heritage. In collaboration with experts and scientists, DCX creates immersive 3D, VR and AR experiences using storytelling and interactive gaming tools in museums, engaging the visitor in an educational and leisure experience. Monuments, artefacts and personalities come to life through virtual and augmented reality applications to make learning and the museum’s visit a joyful experience.

The impact of CREAT4MED support

CREACT4MED has played a central role in DCX’s journey by providing essential financial support and access to a network of cultural players. This support has enabled DCX to develop and expand its flagship project, Cultural Tour. This immersive application

offers users a unique experience of exploring historic sites through 360° documentaries. Thanks to funding from CREAT4MED, DCX has succeeded in producing immersive content for the Vieux Port de Bizerte, the Fort of Kelibia and the archaeological site of Oudhna, making history accessible and attractive to the younger generation. The project was initiated by collaborating with a specialised 360-degree production company to facilitate filming in 360 degrees. This encompassed the capture of 360-degree photographs for seamless integration

Achievements with CREAT4MED – DCX

- 10 jobs created
- 3 new sites filmed: Oudhna archeological site, the old port of Bizerte, Kelibia Fort
- Launch of their website and mobile application

into the application, as well as the production of 360-degree videos designed for immersive VR documentaries. They were also able to consult with a historian to ensure the scripts are both entertaining and factually accurate.

Scale-up and expansion present obstacles due to the complexity of integrating cutting-edge technologies into heritage education and the reliance on grants and external funding. However, by providing financial resources and networking opportunities, the support of CREAT4MED has been instrumental in overcoming these challenges and ensuring the long-term sustainability and impact of DCX. Overall, the CREAT4MED support has played a pivotal role in bringing DCX closer to its goals by enabling the production of new products solidifying their position as innovators in the industry.

Key successes and partnerships

One of DCX's proudest achievements is the successful integration of its educational tools into the curriculum, enriching the learning experience for students. Strategic alliances with cultural institutions, such as the Tunisian Institute of Technology (IFT) have been instrumental in delivering high-quality, engaging content that resonates with educators and students. These collaborations have been important in increasing DCX's impact and ensuring the sustainability of its projects, and also enriching educational experiences and fostering technological literacy among students.



Essential qualities for entrepreneurial success

DCX's background underlines the importance of several qualities essential to entrepreneurial success in the creative and cultural sectors:

- **Originality and impact:** In a world saturated with options, businesses need to stand out with ethical practices and a vision for positive change. DCX focuses on creating unique and impactful experiences that enrich cultural and historical education.
- **Vision and perseverance:** It is essential to have a clear vision and the perseverance to pursue it despite obstacles. DCX's focus on long-term goals and its ability to rise to challenges have been key to its success.
- **Adaptability:** The creative industries are constantly evolving. DCX has demonstrated adaptability by incorporating new technologies and approaches to stay at the forefront of cultural education.
- **Networking:** Building strong relationships with industry professionals, potential partners and mentors is essential. CREAT4MED's support and resulting partnerships have opened doors for DCX, creating opportunities for growth and collaboration.

Envisioning the future of creativity and culture

DCX sees a bright future for the creative and cultural industries, particularly in the Southern Mediterranean region. The increasing availability of digitisation and technology offers exciting opportunities for innovative cultural experiences. By taking advantage of these advances, DCX intends to continue transforming cultural education and heritage preservation.

With a strong commitment to its vision and the support of strategic partners such as CREAT4MED, DCX is poised to transform cultural education, bring history alive for future generations and inspire a deeper connection to our shared heritage. The stage is set for creative businesses to thrive, with DCX leading the way in embracing technologies and ethical models that shape the future of the industry.



Trendsetting Tunisia: MAFT's Fashion Forward



Malak Hachana and Meriem Aouadi, the founders of MAFT, have embarked on a mission to reshape the fashion and creative industries in Tunisia and the Maghreb. Both with diverse backgrounds and extensive experience in the creative and cultural sectors, they have pooled their talents to create a platform that not only supports fashion designers and creative entrepreneurs, but also celebrates the rich cultural heritage of the Mediterranean.

The impact of CREAT4MED support

CREACT4MED's grant and training have been instrumental in MAFT's development, Malak and Meriem tell us. The support enabled MAFT to accelerate the integration of its website, combining its magazine and agency services into a coherent digital platform. This consolidation has enabled them to better promote the Maghreb creative scene through a series of initiatives. Funding has facilitated the creation of quality content, the organisation of events and the launch of editorial projects highlighting the region's creativity. These initiatives have extended their reach and impact, fostering the birth of a vibrant and dynamic cultural community.

Achievements with CREAT4MED – MAFT

- Supported 30 brands and designers
- Organized 4+ events for local fashion promotion
- Reached 5,800 users on the magazine site
- Attracted 411 page views from 248 users on the agency site

Entrepreneurial success in the creative and cultural sectors

One of MAFT’s major successes is the successful organisation of its fashion shows and events. What started out as a small gathering, has grown to attract renowned designers and fashion enthusiasts. These events have become essential in fostering contacts and promoting cultural exchange, consolidating MAFT’s position as a key player in the fashion industry. Thanks to CREAT4MED, MAFT has forged partnerships with various creative companies, enabling them to offer services and sell products throughout the region. These partnerships have been essential in extending their reach and strengthening their impact.

Guiding aspirations: Malak and Meriem’s advice to entrepreneurs

Malak explains that her path in the cultural and creative industries has been driven by multifaceted passions and the desire to explore various creative avenues. During her university years, she gained a deep understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing creators in the Tunisian ecosystem. “My advice to budding entrepreneurs is to find their “why” - a deep, personal reason for entering the industry. This goal will be your anchor, keeping you grounded and motivated in difficult times” she explains. CEO Meriem also gives us an insight into her “why”. “Fashion is the fruit of a personal passion, and the MAFT project reflects my mission to promote our cultural heritage in fashion. Success requires endurance and resilience. The creative and cultural sectors can be unpredictable and challenging. Flexibility is essential in these dynamic sectors. Be open to exploring new approaches and solutions to keep your creative juices flowing. In addition, always stay in touch with your target audience and take into account the context of the time and place.”

Malak and Meriem both stress the importance of building strong networks within the industry. These relationships can provide support, collaboration opportunities and valuable information. They also stress the need for ongoing training, and for staying true to one’s values and artistic integrity.





MAFT: a positive impact on the environment

In addition to its cultural contributions, MAFT is committed to promoting sustainability in the fashion industry. It has put practices in place that support local craftsmanship and environmentally friendly production methods. By encouraging collaborations with artisans who use sustainable materials and techniques, MAFT aims to reduce the environmental footprint of the fashion sector in the region.

MAFT's global approach combines specialized consulting, branding and digital storytelling, enabling fashion designers to express their individuality and creativity. Its impact on the creative and cultural industry has been significant, increasing community engagement, promoting cultural diversity and supporting the development of emerging fashion brands. As MAFT continues to grow, its commitment to sustainability and cultural preservation remains at the forefront. It strives to inspire and support the next generation of designers, ensuring that the Maghreb's creative and cultural industries develop and evolve.

maft



Frame of Mind: Immersive Art with The Virtual Art Gallery

La Galerie VR is a digital platform for the creation and reproduction, hosting, and sale of 360° 3D virtual tours and VR (Virtual Reality), specialising in visual art exhibition spaces. The virtual tours remain faithful to the architecture, the accuracy of the artworks, the spirit, and the atmosphere of the exhibitions. With 20 years of experience in 3D (Archviz), co-founders Hamza and Siryne specialise in interior architecture and new immersive technologies such as video games and VR, La Galerie VR creates existing or imagined spaces for art exhibitions. La Galerie VR allows the user to completely immerse in an interactive and hyper-realistic virtual reality.



With the CREAT4MED subgrant, Hamza and Siryne successfully launched a marketing campaign targeting art galleries in the Mediterranean and MENA region. Boosting visibility through social media, they reached out to potential clients, providing free virtual tours to one gallery in Tunisia and one artist, Fabio Adani, from Italy. These showcased the capabilities of the Virtual Art Gallery and attracted new visitors.

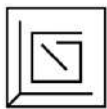
Achievements with CREAT4MED – The Virtual Art Gallery

- 10 jobs created
- Acquired the “Start-up Label”
- Launch of the collective virtual exhibition with over 112 applications
- Exhibition of 18 artists in the virtual exhibition
- Virtual Tour integrated into the website
- Attendance at the WebSummit in Lison

To enhance technical competencies in video game programming, specifically for creating the MVP, Hamza, Chief Technology Officer, underwent training on Blueprints for Unreal Engine. Hamza acquired essential skills that were instrumental in building the MVP together with a programmer which eventually led to the development of the MVP: a 3D real time virtual visit using Unreal Engine.

“[With CREAT4MED, La Galerie VR] made significant progress in achieving its objectives and laying the groundwork for future growth and sustainability.”

The Virtual Art Gallery also actively participated in the WebSummit Lisbon with a booth offering virtual tours displayed through VR headset. The acquisition of Oculus quest 2 headsets facilitated the delivery of an immersive experience to visitors, showcasing the capabilities of the Virtual Art Gallery platform.



The
Virtual
Art Gallery







Project Coordinator



EMEA

The Euro-Mediterranean Economists Association, EMEA, is a Barcelona-based regional think-tank that serves as a leading independent and innovative policy research institution; a forum for debate on the political and socio-economic reforms in the Mediterranean and Africa; and a promoter of actions and initiatives that fulfil objectives of sustainability, inclusiveness, regional integration and prosperity.

Our Partners



Our Associates



CREACT4MED is a project funded by the European Union (EU) through the EuropeAid Programme, that aims to strengthen businesses and entrepreneurship in the cultural and creative industries (CCIs) in the Southern Neighbourhood of the EU, with a particular focus on young people and women.

The project is coordinated by the Euro-Mediterranean Economists Association (EMEA) as Lead Partner4MED.

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