

Physics for Development: Networking Across the Mediterranean

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For two weeks at the start of April, the International Centre for Theoretical Physics (ICTP) in Trieste was home to 6 enthusiastic and dedicated young women scholars from Palestine and Morocco. Four of them are senior undergraduates from Bethlehem University in Palestine, 2 are currently graduate students from Beni Mellal University in Morocco, and all are members of their respective EPS Young Minds sections. The immediate goal was to learn how to assemble and operate 3D printers, taking advantage of a unique training facility at ICTP, and then taking back the same printers along with their newly acquired knowledge. The intermediate goal is to create twinned fablabs, which is just the start of a further goal; namely to create a network of such fablabs throughout the Mediterranean region. To help with the intermediate goal, it was important that representatives of the two YM sections could train together, forging personal relationships in addition to getting the training they needed.

The overall project coordination came from the EPS Physics for Development Group, but to turn an interesting idea into reality we needed partnerships. To begin with, we needed facilities and ICTP provided access and training in its SciFabLab (<http://scifablab.ictp.it/>) and its guest houses, help with visas, and a share of the travel and meal expenses. With all that generous support at hand, we needed to identify superbly motivated students who could take full advantage of the training. That would be taken care of by two NGOs, Sunshine4Palestine (which also provided for an extra two students from Bethlehem)

working with Bethlehem University, and Migrations co-développement Alsace (MCDA), working with Beni Mellal University. Of course, without having EPS YM sections in place – full of active and engaged students – it would have been very difficult to even start thinking of such a project, let alone making plans to move it forward later. In fact, the project generally pointed to the benefits of forging partnerships spanning across numerous organizations. Of those partners, there is one which especially needs to be mentioned: The advanced studies institute in Trieste, SISSA, helped to organise an exhibition in the city where the students performed science demonstrations for the general public and talked about their experiences.

A fact that may be surprising, at least for Europeans, was that this was the very first trip outside of Palestine for some of those students. As a consequence, they did not miss a beat on the weekend getting to Venice for sight-seeing, to the centre of Trieste for shopping, and overall provided noteworthy support to Italian purveyors of pizza and gelato throughout their stay!

Finally, it should be pointed out that the home universities involved have agreed to help set up the intended fablabs with the idea that they become facilities open to a wider student body. In this case these young scholars have a chance to contribute not only to their communities through outreach in schools and community projects, but also to their own institutions.



Participants at the ICTP SciFabLab.



Caouthar & Souad (Beni Mellal University) assembling a 3D printer.