

Foreword

This year, the European Union's motto seeks to highlight its citizens' "innovative skills". And what better way to celebrate the European Year of Skills than to institutionally support them, as well as highlighting those of young people in presenting their innovative projects in the Euro-Mediterranean region, and having new experiences, both in their own countries and internationally.

Much has been written in books and the press, and even more on social media, about controversies surrounding the so-called "Arab springs or uprisings", although when looking at the governments of these countries it may seem to us that great democratic results have not been achieved, we would be wrong to come to such a superficial conclusion. Some laws have been changed, albeit with great reservations and, above all, the uprisings have been the starting point for a considerable number of young people showing their creativity in action, not only at the time but also later; a creativity designed to ensure that civil society, despite obstacles and dangers, continues to develop and act. Today young people share their concerns and desires, and even take great strides forward when it comes to creating an international fabric of association that strengthens their initiatives, whether they are social, environmental or artistic. For this reason, on the long journey of *Quaderns de la Mediterrània*, created in 2000 to give a platform to the voices and cultures of both Mediterranean shores, we now present the dossier "The Innovative Social Skills of Euro-Mediterranean Youth".

This publication, issue 35, features the contributions of around twenty young people from the Euro-Mediterranean countries. Some work out of local networks that are part of the Anna Lindh Foundation, an institution created in 2005 to be a large network of Mediterranean networks; while others are members of university research labs and, despite their youth, some of their contributions are part of important projects carried out by local or international institutions, with and for young people.

Since its beginnings in 1989, the IEMed has had a special interest in young people, women and the environment, supporting meetings, ministerial conferences and international projects, as well as producing reflective information in its publications. It is true that in the last fifteen years a range of projects has been implemented based on the interest in giving young people a voice and strengthening the role of women, as well as on the need to achieve the objectives of the 2030 Agenda. One of those projects is the contest "A Sea of Words", which began in 2008 and this year, 2023, is already in its sixteenth edition. As is usual in every *Quaderns de la Mediterrània*, this issue contains the stories by the three young people aged 18 to 30 who won the 2022 contest. This is a commitment that reflects the voice of young people, as well as their desires.

According to the projects set out and their creators, we have divided the dossier "The Innovative Social Skills of Euro-Mediterranean Youth" into three main sections: 1) Cre-

ativity, Values and Self-Esteem; 2) Social and Environmental Entrepreneurship and New Technologies; and 3) Multilevel Governance: Institutions and Civil Society to Empower Youth. The dossier features interviews with two young creators and activists: Abeer Butmeh, a Palestinian environmental activist, and award-winning Lebanese filmmaker Sarah Francis. The Cultural Overview section completes the publication.

One of the important aspects that we wanted to highlight in this issue on the skills of young people in creating innovative projects is the vital collaboration between government institutions, whether local or international, and civil society. This is a very necessary aspect for bringing about the improvements that can be made through projects with and for young people, since they are already the present and the future. In this respect, we would like to highlight some institutional collaborations, in addition to the projects presented by our young contributors. We think that our readers may be interested in some events that have taken place and will take place throughout this year. In April 2023, we held a seminar at Casa Árabe called “Cooperación al desarrollo en el Mediterráneo: tendencias y retos de futuro / Future Trends and Challenges in Mediterranean Development Cooperation”, in which an attempt was made to contextualise the integration of youths in the renewed MASAR cooperation programme of the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID) in the Southern Mediterranean. The seminar reflected on specific issues, such as gender, youth, employment and entrepreneurship, ending with a session on youth and the new economies of sustainability.

On 9 October, the Euromed Young Researchers Forum will take place in Madrid and is based on the Forum that EuroMeSCo holds every year, bringing together a group of selected young people to discuss specific issues related to Euro-Mediterranean relations. The aim is to exchange ideas on how a new generation of researchers can contribute to policy debates with other significant stakeholders, including policy-makers. The 2023 Forum will be called “Bridging Divides: Exploring Youth Approaches to Conflict Resolution in the Changing Euro-Mediterranean Region”. Meanwhile, between 6 and 9 November the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) will hold the Mediterranean Youth Academy (MYA) in Barcelona.¹ The third MYA will be an onsite event combining panels and workshops using non-formal education methods with high-level panels. During the workshops, the young participants will be encouraged to identify key policy recommendations linked to the thematic groups: climate change and climate justice, youth employment, and social inclusion. The aim is to propose youth-relevant initiatives with a potential impact within the Mediterranean region.

Research, knowledge and action are the fundamental pillars to promote necessary and specific advances within the broad Euro-Mediterranean region. The articles by the young people who contribute to this issue can help with these reflections.

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1. <https://bityl.co/Jmnl>