



Media Loves Tech

Impact stories



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Media Loves Tech

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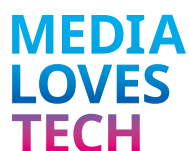
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Foreword

MEDIA LOVES TECH is the name and the idea behind this project that got underway in 2018. The goal is to bring together two worlds that are often too far apart: journalism and the startup community.

Together with Al Khatt, a local project partner and non-governmental media organization, we wanted to scout, promote, develop and test innovations for the media sector.

That same year, a legal support framework for startups in Tunisia came into effect, structured around a label of merit and benefits for entrepreneurs, investors and startups. Just like MEDIA LOVES TECH, it aims to support development through bold entrepreneurial spirit and innovative ideas.

Since its launch, the annual MEDIA LOVES TECH incubation program, financed by the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), supports eight to twelve startups.

Implemented almost entirely online, and originally as a three-day mentor-supported hackathon, it has grown to become an incubation cycle that lasts three months. It promotes all phases of a startup—from the original idea to market entry.

Vera Möller-Holtkamp
Program Director Tunisia
DW Akademie

It has been five years since the program was started and it is still going strong. This publication is an initial assessment.

Does the belief that progress comes from promoting innovation hold true? Can promoting new media projects with viable business models succeed in an unstable economic or political environment? One needs to look at various aspects to find answers.

It is often said that over 90 percent of startups go under in the first two years. Still, startups are often seen as a forerunner to economic development and as having a stimulating effect on the overall economy. Even if initiatives do flop, their traces can still be found in the ecosystem.

When assessing the MEDIA LOVES TECH program, it is worth reflecting on what has been achieved and gaining insights for the future. Five projects are presented here. Our team has taken an in-depth look at the projects' stories and progress and includes key performance indicators. Measuring impact in an unsteady startup environment can be a challenge, and our success stories address this. But as we at DW Akademie believe, "**big changes start small,**" and so do the startups presented here.



medialovestech.com



From a Blue TN video on plastic pollution.

Blue TN

New media startup focuses on environmental issues

It's informative and creative: the Blue TN project is raising Tunisians' awareness about climate change and environmental concerns.

Back in 2017, Mayssa Sandli was packing her backpack and getting her bicycle ready to embark on an exciting tour through southern Tunisia. Her goal was to promote eco-tourism but didn't realize how shocked she would be by the region's industrial pollution and desertification.

The young engineer would also be stunned by the impact it was having on people's health.

“ Tunisia, like elsewhere in the world, has been strongly affected by climate change but major media outlets here show little interest in covering its local impact.

With her background in quality control, security and the environment, Sandli knew she would have to act quickly if she wanted to bring about change. She decided to develop Blue TN, a project to help resolve Tunisia's growing environmental plight and address the global climate crisis.

Meeting the challenges

“We're 100 percent digital native, 100 percent ecological and 100 percent creative” is the project's motto and her startup offers users informative and accurate content on environmental challenges. Content like this is otherwise scarce in a country where journalists struggle to get paid for stories tackling pollution and the effects of global warming.

“Tunisia, like elsewhere in the world, has been strongly affected by climate change but major media outlets here show little interest in covering its local impact,” Sandli explains. “As a result, Tunisians are less aware of how it is affecting their own lives.”

At the same time, climate and environmental concerns are also pushing global economic markets toward more sustainable models, resulting in a growing need for media platforms that reflect models like this and provide accurate coverage.

Attracting users with innovative reliable content

Blue TN has responded with an online magazine on environmental issues; the startup is also very active on social media. The challenge here is to quickly gain and retain users' attention, so Blue TN produces easy-to-understand messages that can be humorous or at times grating, but that always offer factual content. This strategy is proving successful: in the summer of 2022, it posted a video about forest fires that was viewed more than 140,000 times on Facebook.

Sandli and her team have also organized more than ten events with NGOs and local communities as part of Blue TN's awareness campaign, and worked together with the NGOs Tunisie Recyclage and Tounes Clean-Up to plant more than 7,000 trees in various parts of Tunisia.

Blue TN as a marketplace

The project has since become a one-stop site for communicating about environmental concerns: in addition to its online

magazine, Blue TN has established a communication agency and an awareness platform that uses creative approaches with innovative audio-visual formats.

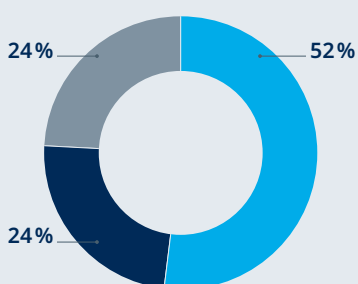
“ We adapted our business model and worked hard to diversify our products.

The project also aims to bridge the gap between consumers and environmentally friendly products. New and emerging actors who offer highly competitive eco-responsible products often struggle to access a market that values responsible consumerism. Blue TN will be offering a platform to showcase these products and offer more competitive marketing fees than traditional media outlets.

Blue TN

Facebook followers **68,000**
Reached Facebook users **667,000**
Team members **12**

Projected average monthly income 2022



- Donors
- Sales
- Others



Learn more:
blue tunisia.com

As of September 2022



Blue TN founder Mayssa Sandli speaking at the conference “Assises Interantionales du Journalisme” in Tunis, March 2022.



Effective incubation period

Sandli's Blue TN project and team were accepted to the 2021 MEDIA LOVES TECH program and this, she says, transformed the way she originally thought her project would develop.

"We adapted our business model and worked hard to diversify our products," she says, and stresses the importance of having mentors as part of the three-month incubation period. With their coaching, the team rethought its financial strategy and now aims for community members to become partners and customers, and to build communication channels with the close support of activists.

Blue TN won second prize at the MEDIA LOVES TECH competition, and Sandli says in addition to having learned so much during the program, "the money has been a great help, too!"

With the 4,000 euros seed funding, Sandli hired part-time editors for the project's budding activities and products. In 2021 she achieved another milestone, securing a collaboration between Tunisia's Ariana province and the German Heinrich Boll Foundation to create a photo exhibition focusing on the province's pollution problem.

Committed to covering climate change

The young entrepreneur has worked hard over the past few years and has expanded her team: by August 2022 Blue TN had grown from originally two members to now a total of 12. She has put a special focus on recruiting more female members and bringing together journalists, civil society activists and governmental agencies.

Her work is paying off: Blue TN has since received requests for collaboration from several clients, organizations and festivals.

Six years after her bike tour of southern Tunisia, Sandli says she is now more dedicated than ever to raising public awareness about pollution and climate change and promoting sustainable development. Why is that, you might ask. "It's because people believe in our project!" she responds.



REC

Raouia Kheder recording a podcast on the Startup Act 2.0 for the Tunisian NGO "Tunisian Startups."

Tunisia Podcasts

A platform for new audio formats

Raouia Kheder became a radio journalist soon after the fall of Tunisia's autocratic regime in 2011. Passionate about podcasts, Kheder has since launched the platform Tunisia Podcasts.

Like many young Tunisians, Raouia Kheder set out to live her dreams after the ousting of the country's former president and dictator, Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali, in January 2011.

“ I came to Media Loves Tech to adopt a process, to learn how to get ahead as an entrepreneur.

Originally trained as an architect, Kheder had long wanted to become a journalist. “I had always written and wanted to do this for a living,” she says. It was good timing because Tunisia was savoring its newly found freedom.

Getting started

The country's media landscape was soon booming and Kheder joined *Opinions*, a new monthly magazine. She was also increasingly drawn to radio, she says, and began working for Radio Tunis Chaîne Internationale (RTCI), the country's public radio station where she still works, focusing on cultural, social and women's issues.

At the time, she also began developing a Maghreb media outlet to promote intercultural ties between Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia. Although the project turned out to be more complicated than she had thought and had to abandon it, she remained determined to make a difference.

The pandemic then hit in 2020. “When the lockdown came, I started listening just to podcasts,” she recalls. “In May 2020, I went on to develop my first sound production which later became my first podcast series, ‘Khedma Ndhifa,’ Arabic for ‘clean service.’”

Gaining confidence as an entrepreneur

Kheda was accepted to the 2020 MEDIA LOVES TECH program with her idea to develop a platform that would not only host her podcasts but also offer audio production support. The program's incubation period helped her better define her product, she says. She also had another goal. “I came to MEDIA LOVES TECH to adopt a process, to learn how to get ahead as an entrepreneur because I'd previously found the process far too complicated,” she explains. Through the program, she learned how to create a business model and establish a process for developing products, she says, and was able to network with other participants. “I became more confident thanks to the program,” she points out. Local legislation, she adds, has also guaranteed her tax exemption for four years which is reassuring and gives her more time to develop her startup.

A stronger focus on coaching

Her platform tunisiapodcasts.tn was launched in September 2022 and hosts content. Kheder is also adjusting the plan she had developed during the MEDIA LOVES TECH program.

“I originally thought I'd gain visibility with the platform to find clients and to work more on executive production, but a new aspect is emerging,” she says.

She now rarely produces content herself and instead coaches and supports a growing number of partners with regards to writing, editing and production approaches. Her clients include non-profit and non-governmental organizations such as the Munathara Foundation and TunisianStartups, and a cooperation with the GIZ project, 'Podcast Studio Lab.' "The last six months have seen incredible changes, with the podcast culture gaining ground in Tunisia and boosted by the NGO network," she points out. "It's becoming more inventive with different testimonials and formats."

“ The last six months have seen incredible changes [...].

With Tunisia Podcasts now a key player in an expanding market, Kheder has additional plans for her project. The next step, she says, is to develop a promotional campaign, an operational platform and a mobile website—and perhaps even a Tunisian podcasting festival.

"But I'm going to go at my own pace", Kheder says, "and taking things one step at a time."

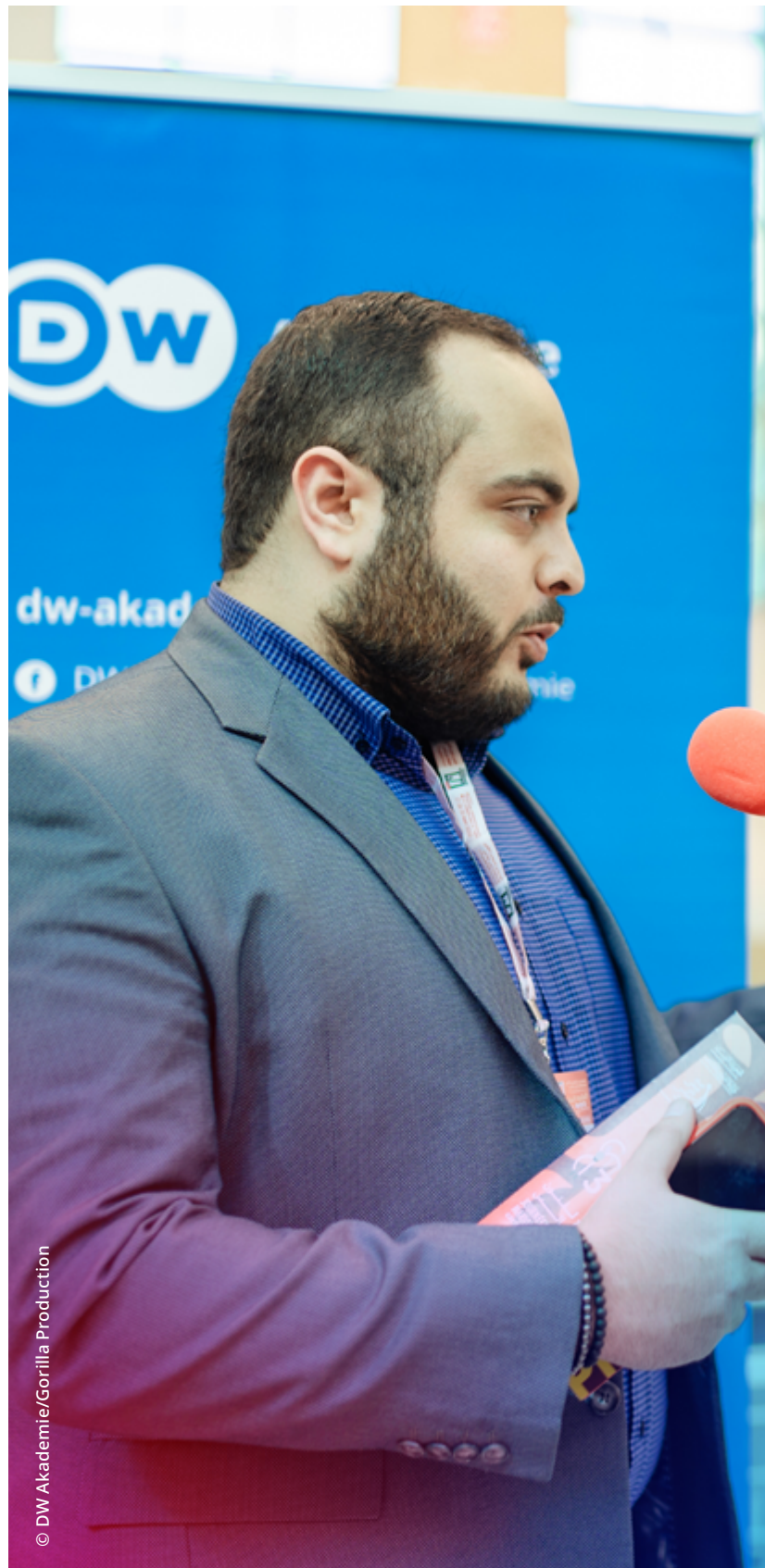
Tunisia Podcasts

| | |
|--------------------------------|-----|
| Team members | 4 |
| Podcast series on the platform | 14 |
| Produced episodes | 154 |



Learn more:
tunisiapodcasts.tn

As of September 2022



© DW Akademie/Gorilla Production



Raouia Kheder conducting an interview at the "Assises Interantionales du Journalisme" conference in Tunis, March 2022.



Co-founder Nouha Lahbib testing the startup's VR platform.

AST'Lab

Innovative digital storytelling

Combining journalism with technology can produce exciting, creative and educational products. That's what AST'Lab does, joining innovative journalism approaches with new media formats.

Najla Trabelsi and Nouha Lahbib are the creative minds behind the AST'Lab project which won third prize at the 2021 MEDIA LOVES TECH competition.

“ We like to think out of the box.

The two Tunisian entrepreneurs are experts in audio visual production and have combined their passion for storytelling and Tunisia's cultural heritage with their fascination for new tools and technologies. The results are a lab for innovative format production and a platform that, with 3D glasses, offers users immersive experiences in virtual reality.

“We like to think out of the box,” says co-founder Trabelsi. “Our goal is to introduce new technology tools that make media content much more engaging.”

Trabelsi studied film, with a focus on directing and editing, and her partner has a background in product and graphic design. Both women work full-time at Tunisia's Ministry of Culture but their entrepreneurial drive has also had them exploring opportunities outside of their daily routine.

They had originally wanted to design a co-working space and an incubator but when the Covid-19 pandemic broke out they, like other project developers around the world, had to adapt their

idea. As a result, they decided to turn their project into a real business and called it AST'Lab—a startup that focuses on art, science and technology.

“Transitioning to a digital native media has been a great opportunity to produce innovative media formats that target journalists, other media professionals and video users,” Lahbib says.

They knew that Tunisia's digital sphere needed more creative content, especially in times of crisis; as a result, AST'Lab enables users to navigate this content using digital devices.

With the lab, for example, the founders and their team developed a virtual prototype of a “rachidi,” a traditional Tunisian music house. With the aid of virtual reality (VR), users can explore architectural details and enjoy an interactive experience.

A lab of ideas

The AST'Lab team not only produces branded content but is also a service provider for clients. The team assists those who for creative or marketing purposes want to turn their ideas into exciting media content.

For example, they produced a holobox for their client Educ'Art, enabling it to project 3D-holographic content to showcase its products at fairs and events—in this case, without the use of 3D glasses. At the international museum trade fair SITEM 2022 in Paris, people used the holobox to virtually visit a French castle.

In 2022, team members also took part in “Assises Internationales du Journalisme,” an international conference for

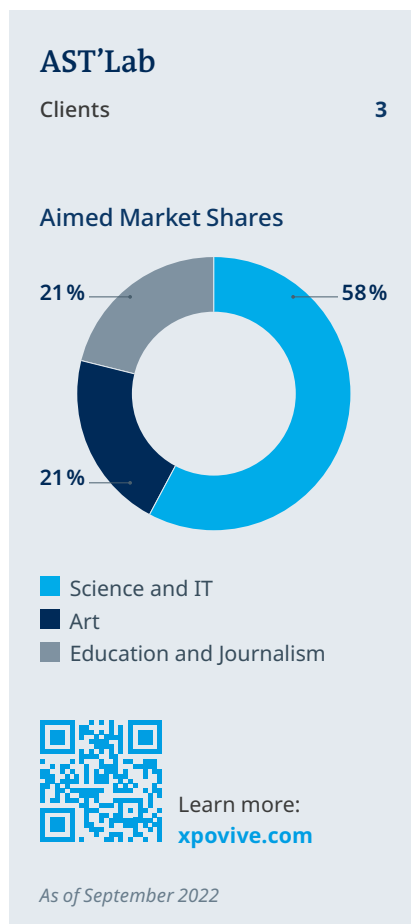
Tunisian journalists and media actors. There the team tested their products which have since become part of the country's media landscape.

"Our services go beyond classic photography and video production—we also use VR, holograms and other innovative formats," Trabelsi and Lahbib explain.

"With our expertise, we're able to support customers in terms of technology as well as in editing content and this way create outstanding media projects," they say.

“ Our services go beyond classic photography and video production [...].

To foster new media content, the AST'Lab team plans to launch the "Media Creative Lab," a workshop lab that focuses on creative content and that is aimed at





© DW Akademie/Gorilla Production

journalists and media professionals needing the skills to use new technologies.

Participants will learn to create 360° reportages, VR stories, 360° photographs, podcasting and more.

Mentorship for entrepreneurs

Trabelsi and Lahbib's work and innovative ideas earned them a place in the 2021 MEDIA LOVES TECH intake. The program, they say, introduced them to aspects they had never before explored.

"It inspired us right from the start," recalls Trabelsi. "We worked hard during the intensive three-day bootcamp and learned a lot about how to develop a business strategy."

Thanks to team spirit and support from MEDIA LOVES TECH mentors, the entrepreneurs say they overcame obstacles and developed prototypes.

Making their startup viable

Xpovive is AST'Lab's latest product—a website reflecting immersive experiences that range from augmented reality product marketing to virtual tours of famous sites.

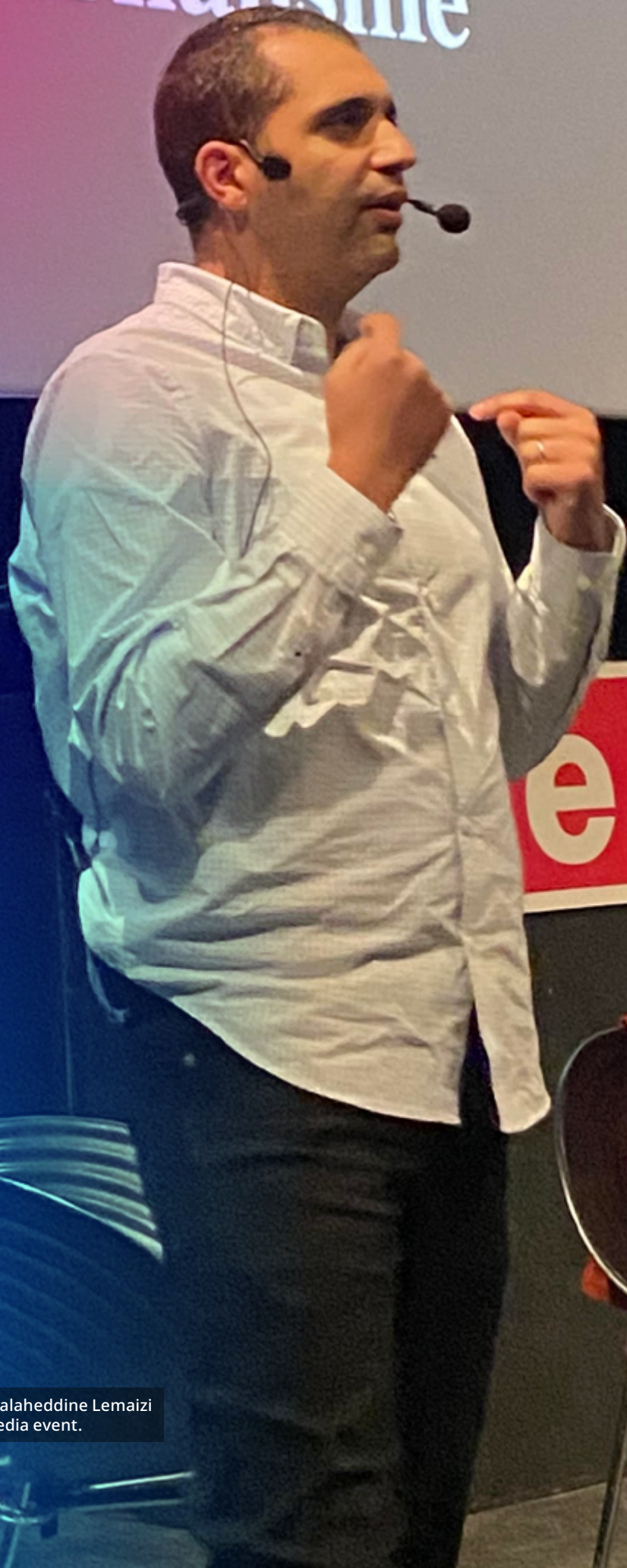
“ We're recreating events and destinations, and that's what drives us!

The team also aims to acquire the official Tunisian startup label as part of their startup's media viability strategy.

Trabelsi's and Lahbib's project is pushing boundaries, making the digital sphere more exciting and diverse. Trabelsi admits that project development can be taxing, but that their energy, creativity and partnerships are moving the whole team ahead.

"And when I get tired and see too many challenges, I just put on my VR glasses and dive into this virtual world", she says, and adds, "We're recreating events and destinations, and that's what drives us!"

journalisme



المدرسة
الليبية
من
التي
التي

Ennas founder Salaheddine Lemaizi speaking at a media event.

Enass

Bridging the gap on social rights reporting in Morocco

Journalist Salaheddine Lemaizi left his job at a prominent media outlet to start Enass, an independent digital platform that is gaining credibility.

Salaheddine Lemaizi is not just an award-winning journalist but a committed activist and media entrepreneur. After working for traditional media for many years, he developed the independent platform Enass, the Arabic word for “the people.”

“I had spent several years working for traditional media but they weren’t regularly reporting on these people and lacked professionalism and respect for their dignity,” Lemaizi points out. “The media need to provide better coverage of the working-class population and communities with a migrant background,” he stresses, “and that’s why I founded Enass.”

Rethinking approaches

His team had always been enthusiastic but the project needed an additional boost, he says. This came in the form of the MEDIA LOVES TECH program which selected his project for the 2020 intake.

Lemaizi and his team changed their production and implementation approaches during the incubation period. “Regular mentoring sessions and discussions with other project teams helped us with questions we had about the project’s design, our editorial line and other aspects about the launch of a media platform,” Lemaizi says.

Although Lemaizi’s project did not win the media startup competition—its business model, technical aspects and scalability needed additional development—the MEDIA LOVES TECH program is not just about winning: it’s about furthering promising startups like Enass.

“**The media need to provide better coverage of the working-class population and communities with a migrant background.**”

Under the motto “The media of the voiceless in Morocco,” he officially launched his alternative digital media outlet in February 2022, delivering quality journalism for readers in Morocco and elsewhere in the Maghreb region. Unlike mainstream outlets, it has a collaborative approach, with the audience at the heart of the stories, Lemaizi says.

Speaking out and being heard

The online platform provides space for underrepresented voices including those of migrants, minorities and marginalized communities. It features articles, reports and research on asylum seekers in Morocco, and on social, human rights and environmental issues. In addition to its website, the platform is active on social media—primarily on Facebook and X (formerly Twitter)—and has an active community of followers who share, comment and suggest topics that are at the core of their social struggles.

Planning new strategies

The project's main challenge now, Lemaizi points out, is the project's viability and finding sustainable funding. "Our strategy is focusing on two main points: the upcoming launch of our membership program and developing partnerships with other publishers and media outlets so we can pool resources and content," he says.

Similar alternative media platforms are emerging in Morocco, Tunisia and elsewhere in the region; they produce professional content, engage with social media audiences and are interested in cross-border collaborations. This gives young platforms like Enass the chance to develop partnerships, exchange content and establish synergies with platforms sharing the same editorial style and goals.

Gaining recognition

"Our coverage of events in the northern city of Nador, for example, shows just how relevant and valuable Enass is, including on social media," Lemaizi notes. He is referring to a clash in June 2022 between the Moroccan police and sub-Saharan migrants, when at least 23 migrants died trying to jump the fence that separates Morocco from the Spanish enclave, Melilla. In November of that year, the Enass team then contributed local and technical expertise

to the collaborative investigation by the media outlets "El Pais," "Der Spiegel," "Le Monde," "The Independent" and by the collaborative journalism website, "Lighthouse Report."

“ We're quick on the ground and we're gaining credibility.

Lemaizi's team has since grown from initially three members to three full-time journalists, a video journalist, a community manager and a project manager for administration and financial matters. Freelance editors and graphic designers now also work for the platform, as do freelance journalists who report on migration, workers' rights and the refugee crisis in Morocco and the Maghreb region.

"People see us as a media outlet with a special focus," says Lemaizi describing the platform. "Even though we still have limited resources, we're quick on the ground and," he stresses, "we're gaining credibility."



Enass

| | |
|------------------------|---------------------------|
| Launch | September 21, 2022 |
| Facebook followers | 4,720 |
| Reached Facebook users | 180,000 |
| Twitter followers | 1,740 |



Learn more:
enass.ma

As of September 2022

Location of various MEDIA LOVES TECH startups in Morocco and Algeria, 2020

Algiers



ineffable Art et Culture
Platform on Algerian arts and cultural heritage
First prize

Casablanca



Enass
Fact-checking platform for marginalized voices

Rabat



Tahaqaq
Fact-checking platform

Temara



Shifaa
Platform on health issues
Second prize





MEDIA LOVES TECH
1 Des solutions numériques pour
4 app pour l'analyse forensique
4 app Tarjetas, así como el en el Algoritmo
Gagnant(e)
Édition 2021

Winners of the 2021 MEDIA LOVES TECH competition:
Hibatollah Bouslama and Makrem Dhifalli from FLEN.

FLEN

Reliable financial data for journalists and finance experts

Data analyst Makrem Dhifalli and his team have launched a tool to revolutionize how journalists and business specialists access reliable financial data.

The FLEN team won first prize at the MEDIA LOVES TECH competition and behind their project's name lies a search engine that, in a closed beta test, provided fast, precise and reliable financial data on Tunisia's public companies.

The technology is based on artificial intelligence with a focus on machine learning, and founder Makrem Dhifalli says his tool fills a gap in Tunisia's economic sector.

“ I never expected the project would be accepted for the incubation period.

With his background in technology and a belief in the power of accessibility, he applied his deep interest in artificial intelligence and corporate-related data to create a project that aims to thrive in the tech startup scene.

Not just for fiscal experts

While FLEN is primarily designed for banks, financial institutions and online payment platforms that require reliable financial data, the tool, Dhifalli says, will also help journalists who need swift access to company information such as ownership, activities and shareholders.

Given the lack of reliable and trusted financial data worldwide, tools such as FLEN can also help economic actors when making financial decisions. The

start-ups's core innovation is collecting data from various sources and providing useful insights on a user-friendly interface.

Unlike financial analysts who frequently have access to insider tools, journalists often struggle to find reliable financial information due to a lack of resources, infrastructure or an understanding of complex financial data. This easy-to-use intelligent database will help them sort out and aggregate economic, scientific and business-related data, and mapping relevant to the financial sector.

FLEN can also safeguard them from becoming vulnerable to false information and manipulated data. Protection like this is key when researching financial issues.

Project wins first prize

When Dhifalli started working on his idea, he says he had been interested in the MEDIA LOVES TECH program and had also followed previous intakes. "Still," he admits, "I never expected my project would be accepted for the incubation period."

It was not only accepted but went on to win the MEDIA LOVES TECH's top seed funding award of 10,000 euros.

Dhifalli and his team have since launched the project's full version, offering journalists various training modules such as how to use the platform, financial and business investigations, understanding the basics of finances and accounting, company-related legal aspects, and how to work with and visualize data.

New plans ahead

The FLEN team is also working on personalizing the user experience according to the needs of different fields.

Although there is still much work ahead, Dhifalli says the media sector's ongoing transformation offers a real chance for his startup: it is in step with the emerging and creative media sector and if that sector thrives, he says, FLEN will as well. After all, he emphasizes, his project is built on quality and timely information.

MEDIA LOVES TECH Incubation Data

| | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 | TOTAL |
|---------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|-------|
| Valid MLT applications | 60 | 57 | 55 | 54 | 32 | 30 | 288 |
| Selected teams | 10 | 12 | 12 | 12 | 8 | 8 | 62 |
| Finished incubation | 10 | 12 | 11 | 9 | 5 | — | 47 |
| Follow up / go to market | 0 | 0 | 3 | 2 | 2 | — | 7 |
| Currently active teams | 1 | 2 | 4 | 5 | 4 | — | 16 |
| Women ratio | 24% | 40% | 45% | 48% | 47% | 50% | 42% |

As of November 2023

Location of various MEDIA LOVES TECH startups in Tunisia, 2018–2021



Ariana

Econo.Brief

Econo.Brief
Newsletter on fiscal data, 2021
Science journalism prize

Kairouan

LOOK

LOOK
Digital video media, 2021

Kef



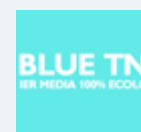
Hexamaps
Interactive mapping solutions, 2018



Monastir

Flen
Search engine for fiscal data, 2021
First prize

Nabeul



Blue TN
Online magazine on environmental issues, 2021
Second prize



Sousse

AST'Lab
Studio for new media content, 2021
Third prize



Tunis

Fitounes
Artistic sociocultural platform promoting the city of Tunis, 2019

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DW Akademie is a strategic partner of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development. We also receive funding from the Federal Foreign Office and the European Union and are active in approximately 70 developing countries and emerging economies.



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