

## Annexe 6 : Retranscription complète des entretiens

Azmeh – Basel Sader

Claire Coppée : C

Basel Sader : BS

C : Pour commencer est-ce que vous pouvez me parler de votre parcours et de ce que vous faisiez avant Azmeh ?

BS : *Quand j'étais à l'école je m'ennuyais beaucoup donc j'apprenais toujours des trucs à côté, j'avais toujours un iPad à côté... Quand j'avais des cours de philosophie, de français ou d'anglais, j'étais sur mon iPad. J'ai étudié une année à Paris Dauphine mathématique et économie. Je n'ai pas trop aimé les études mais j'ai bien aimé ce qu'ils nous ont enseigné : on peut créer des choses juste avec des nombres et des maths. Après quand je suis retourné à Jérusalem j'ai commencé droit et gestion des affaires à l'université hébraïque. Là-bas j'ai commencé à apprendre la programmation car c'est ce qu'il me restait de Dauphine après les maths et l'informatique. J'ai fait quelques jeux qui n'avaient pas un grand succès. Je pensais qu'ils auraient du succès mais ça n'a pas été le cas. Et après j'ai créé Azmeh, même pas en tant que start-up mais c'était un problème que je rencontrais comme probablement beaucoup de gens. J'ai pensé que ça pouvait m'aider et aider d'autres gens. Et ça a marché. Je ne m'y attendais pas. Après j'ai continué.*

C : En quoi est-ce que Azmeh consiste ?

BS : *Alors consistait pour être précis. Je ne sais pas si tu es déjà venue en Palestine ?*

C : Oui.

BS : *Alors tu as vu les nombreux checkpoints, avant Ramallah, Jéricho, Jérusalem... Là-bas il y a beaucoup d'embouteillage et parfois pour faire un trajet de 10km je passe deux heures dans ma voiture. Alors l'application Waze, qui est présente plus ou moins partout dans le monde, qui a été rachetée par Google, ne marche pas au niveau des checkpoints. C'était un peu chiant : je pouvais aller de Jérusalem à Tel Aviv, c'est à peu près 52 km, en 45 minutes, et je peux aller de Jérusalem à Ramallah en une heure alors qu'il n'y a que 10 km. Du coup j'ai fait Azmeh, je me suis dit, si Waze ne peut pas le faire, moi je le peux. Du point de vue pratique, s'il y avait des embouteillages sur les checkpoints et si je voulais aller de Jérusalem à Ramallah J'ai 4 5 checkpoints entre les deux villes. Donc la première version m'indiquait le checkpoint le moins embouteillé. C'était très simple et basique. Il n'y avait pas de précision du style "dans une heure il y aura beaucoup d'embouteillage".*

C : Donc ça fonctionnait via les utilisateurs ? Chaque utilisateur pouvait donner des informations relatives à sa position ?

BS : *Tout à fait mais ce sont eux qui donnaient leur témoignage. Ils construisaient leurs données sur base d'autres données. Si toi tu rentres sur l'application, et qu'il y a un d'embouteillage, au début personne ne le voit sur l'application. Alors toi tu l'encodes, puis une autre personne le fait, puis deux autres personnes dans un même radius, un même périmètre, alors ça veut dire que tout le monde confirmé tout le monde. De cette manière, tu ne peux pas dire qu'il y a des embouteillages alors qu'il n'y en a pas, car il y a toujours des gens comme ça.*

C : En fait, comment ça fonctionne ? Est-ce que vous êtes plusieurs à travailler sur ce projet ?

BS : *Pour celui-là j'étais tout seul malheureusement. Je pensais pouvoir le faire tout seul mais ça n'a pas fonctionné.*

C : Vous voulez dire que la première version n'a pas fonctionné ?

BS : *En fait ça a fermé. Azmeh ne fonctionne plus depuis un an.*

C : Pourquoi ? Parce que vous trouviez que ce n'était pas suffisamment performant ?

BS : *Non pas du tout. J'étais dans ma deuxième année de fac quand je l'ai fait. J'avais beaucoup beaucoup de pression pour réussir. J'avais des concours en deuxième année pour passer en troisième année de droit. On avait des entretiens pour obtenir des bons boulots. Dès que j'ai eu fini ma deuxième année j'ai trouvé un boulot dans les Big 4 car j'avais passé beaucoup d'entretiens. Et cette application qui pour moi n'était pas politique, les gens la percevaient comme étant politique. Quelqu'un est allé à la Cour contre moi en disant que l'application aidait le terrorisme. C'était le Council of Settlers for Judea and Samarea. Je reçois donc une lettre comme quoi j'aide le terrorisme. La Cour veut me défendre. Moi j'étais seulement en deuxième année de droit. J'avais mes exams, mes entretiens, mes concours, je n'avais pas trop de temps et j'étais tout seul. Du coup j'ai essayé de tenir. Je faisais des mises à jour. Mais en troisième année, je me suis dit que je n'allais pas aller à la Cour, que j'allais arrêter avec les mises à jour et tout fermer. A la suite de ça, j'ai reçu beaucoup de mails haineux disant que je devais au moins ne pas fermer l'application, même si j'arrêtais les mises à jour. Mais il y avait beaucoup de problèmes. Pendant un deux ou trois mois j'étais mal avec cela. Et puis trois mois après, ça fait deux ans et demi, j'ai commencé ma deuxième start-up qui roule jusque maintenant et qui n'a rien de politique. J'ai fait un algorithme pour aider les restaurants à faire des easier management more efficiently costsaving, upselling, et tout ce qui va avec. On a des services et des applications qu'on vend aux restaurants et restaurateurs.*

C : Et maintenant vous êtes une équipe derrière cela ?

BS : *Oui on a commencé à deux, je n'étais pas tout seul. J'ai commencé avec un très bon pote, lui était beaucoup plus business que moi et moi j'étais beaucoup plus technologie et programme d'ordinateur que lui. Le troisième qu'on a reçu dans notre équipe principale c'était un new hack designer. Lui c'était un key partner. Maintenant, en plus de nous trois, il y a deux développeurs et un graphic designer.*

C : Et chacun fait ça à plein temps ?

BS : *Non moi je suis un avocat maintenant. Je travaille dans un cabinet de dimanche à jeudi. Je travaille pour l'application vendredi et samedi. Mon partner lui il fait ça à plein temps et le new hack designer aussi. Les développeurs et le graphic designer on n'a pas assez de cashflow pour les employer à plein temps. Donc notre collaboration avec eux est project-based. Si on a une nouvelle feature, on leur donne les instructions et ils le font mais c'est toujours task-based car c'est beaucoup trop cher d'entretenir trois développeurs à plein temps.*

C : Est-ce que à la création de la start-up vous avez fait appel aux services d'un incubateur, accélérateur ou toute autre sorte d'organisation de soutien pour les start-ups ?

BS : *Non pas du tout. On a juste commencé moi et mon partner. Après on a enregistré le nom et les droits auprès du ministre de l'économie et de la finance. Et depuis on travaille comme ça. On n'a jamais eu d'aide de la part d'un incubateur ou d'un accélérateur.*

C : Comment est-ce que vous avez financé initialement la création de l'application ?

BS : *C'était grâce à nos boulots. Lui avait deux boulots, et moi aussi, j'étais enseignant à l'université et avocat, et on a financé ça à 50/50. Du coup au total, on avait chacun trois boulots, deux qui nous faisaient gagner de l'argent et l'un qui bénéficiait de cet argent.*

C : Quels sont les plans futurs pour la start-up ?

BS : *Alors nous actuellement on est basé à Ramallah, pas à Jérusalem. On a eu quelques restaurants là-bas, mais quand on est entré sur le marché, on a vu que ce marché n'était pas assez grand et que ça ne valait pas le coup de fonctionner. Ce sont les restaurants qui nous ont aidés à découvrir qu'il y avait bien un market mais qu'il n'était pas assez grand pour nous. Quand je dis assez grand, c'est au niveau du Modèle East et North Africa. On ne cherche pas à travailler mondialement. On se concentre sur les MENA. Du coup on a fait un pivot, on a fini les applications et les mises à jour qui vont aller dans une autre direction. Maintenant la nouvelle direction c'est qu'on cherche les franchises, moyennes. En général les franchises ont plusieurs branches qui vendent les mêmes plats partout sauf deux trois plats qu'ils peuvent adapter à la communauté locale. Donc comme nous on travaille avec les plats et les*

*ingrédients pour savoir combien de temps cela va prendre pour les préparer, si on trouve une franchise moyenne à Ramallah en une semaine on peut aller de Ramallah à Amman à toutes les autres villes de la région car ce sont les mêmes aliments et les mêmes préparations. Donc c'est ça le plan actuel, de trouver des franchises basées à Ramallah qui peuvent nous conduire à Amman, à Dubaï...*

C : Est-ce que l'occupation israélienne a imposé des contraintes sur la création de la start-up et sur ses affaires quotidiennes ?

*BS : Bien-sûr ! Tous les problèmes d'Azmeh étaient liés à l'occupation. Et en même temps s'il n'y avait pas eu l'occupation, il n'y aurait pas eu Azmeh, l'application est née de cela. Mais même avant qu'elle ferme, Azmeh subissait l'occupation. Par exemple il y avait eu un ordre militaire qui a interdit de mettre des infrastructures 3G en Palestine. Et donc pour Azmeh, personne ne pouvait l'utiliser quand il était sur le checkpoint. Seuls ceux qui habitaient à Jérusalem et qui allaient travailler à Ramallah pouvaient faire les mises à jour, car les palestiniens de Jérusalem ont accès à la 3G israélienne. A Jérusalem il y a à peu près 350 000 palestiniens et environ 40 pourcent d'entre eux travaillent à Ramallah. Eux seuls pouvaient faire des mises à jour. Ensuite, dès que la 4g a été installée en Israël, beaucoup d'infrastructure chez eux a été redondante, ils n'en avaient plus besoin car ce n'était pas compatible avec l'infrastructure de la 4g. Donc au lieu de la jeter ou de la recycler, ils l'ont vendu aux Palestiniens et ont levé l'ordre qui interdit la 3g. Depuis un an et demi, on a la 3g. Et ils ont alors mis ordre d'interdiction de la 4g en Palestine. La 3g coûte très cher. Ne pas avoir la 3g était un grand obstacle lié à l'occupation. Maintenant, avec la deuxième start-up, c'est de nouveau très très difficile. Moi j'habite à Jérusalem. Les autres habitent à Ramallah, à Bethléem, et dans deux autres villes. Moi je suis à 10 km de chacun d'eux, peut-être 40 km de celui qui vit à Naplouse. Donc normalement pour les voir ça doit prendre 10 minutes ou 40 minutes en voiture pour celui qui vit à Naplouse. Or dans la réalité ça prend entre 30 minutes et deux heures. Et je n'ai aucun moyen de prévoir combien de temps ça va prendre. C'est très difficile de faire des team meetings car si on a rendez-vous à 17h, moi je peux arriver à 18h, un autre peut ne pas arriver du tout car les israéliens ont décidé de fermer le checkpoint. Tous ces obstacles font qu'on travaille beaucoup plus lentement et de manière moins productive. En plus, il y a aussi une face psychologique. Si j'ai un meeting et que j'arrive en retard car j'ai passé 1h30 dans les embouteillages, je vais arriver très énervé et frustré et la frustration va sortir dans le meeting. Donc oui il y a beaucoup d'influence de l'occupation sur tout ça.*

C : Et vous n'avez jamais envisagé d'aller en Jordanie où les conditions sont plus simples ?

*BS : On l'a envisagé. Quand on a commencé on cherchait des développeurs freelance à l'étranger sur internet. La plupart du temps ils offraient même des prix moindres. Et puis on s'est dit que non, nous on est palestinien, et on veut que, si jamais ça marche, et si jamais l'entreprise a du succès, on veut dire*

*que le succès est 100% palestinien. Ça aurait pu être plus facile si on était en Jordanie ou si on avait des développeurs indiens, ou de Singapour qui sont très talentueux et qui font un travail qualitatif, mais on ne voulait pas cette option facile. On veut aussi créer du boulot ici. Pour le moment, il y en a 4 dans l'équipe qui ont un salaire, ça fait déjà 4 palestiniens avec un emploi. Moi je préfère donner un salaire à 4 palestiniens plutôt qu'à 4 jordaniens, ou 4 philippins.*

*Maintenant, les personnes vont voir que pendant des années notre start-up et l'entreprise qu'elle est devenue a fonctionné en Palestine. Tout ce qu'on avait entendu avant, avec Azmeh, tous les gens qui me disaient : « tu ne vas jamais réussir. Avec le taux d'échec ici il n'y a personne qui va t'aider, il n'y a rien ici ». Jusque maintenant les gens nous disent ça. On se dit alors que si notre affaire fonctionne, et on travaille tous les jours pour assurer que ça fonctionne, on pourra dire à ces gens : " merci mais vous avez tort. C'est 100% palestinien et ça a marché. ". Peut-être que ça donnera un peu d'espoir aux personnes qui hésitent à se lancer, qui ont 50% d'envie de se lancer et 50% de peur. On pourrait les amener à 80% d'envie. Et après on verra un boom entrepreneurial en Palestine, et qui a d'ailleurs déjà commencé.*

C : Vous avez parlé du fait que la population pense que la création de start-ups ne fonctionne pas en Palestine. Donc vous pensez que de manière générale la population est averse au risque entrepreneurial ? Et y a-t-il une promotion de l'entrepreneuriat ?

BS : *Non pas du tout. Ce n'est pas qu'il n'y a pas de promotion, c'est l'extrême inverse. Il y a beaucoup de démotivation parce que l'entrepreneuriat et les start-ups ont un truc en commun, c'est qu'il y a un risque. Que le risque soit calculé ou non, ça reste un risque. Alors le problème ici, culturellement et politiquement, c'est que tous ce qu'on fait est risqué. Les gens risquent de ne pas avoir de maison demain car elle peut être détruite. Les gens risquent de ne plus avoir de boulot demain car à n'importe quel moment ils peuvent leur dire qu'il n'y a plus d'argent car ils n'ont pas obtenu les permis nécessaires. J'ai de l'argent mais je ne peux pas acheter du pain car Israël n'a pas laissé entrer de farine. Donc il y a toujours ces risques quotidiens essentiels et personne ne pense à prendre un risque supplémentaire. Pourquoi prendrais-je un risque supplémentaire alors que j'ai déjà un million de risques quotidiens auxquels penser ? Ça ne vaut pas le coup. Moi je viens d'un milieu privilégié car les parents ont essayé de me donner une vie plutôt à l'abri des risques. Et cela m'a aidé à me lancer car je sais mes parents me protègent de beaucoup des risques quotidiens. Il reste des risques, car un Palestinien à Jérusalem c'est une situation risquée. Mais ils sont limités pour moi. Je dois tirer profit de cela et l'utiliser pour essayer d'améliorer moi-même l'entrepreneuriat et la situation en Palestine. Mais je suis conscient que les gens qui me mettent en garde ont raison. De leur point de vue, c'est très risqué de se lancer. Mais moi j'ai une vie un peu différente donc je peux me permettre de prendre ce risque pour montrer aux*

*gens que c'est possible. On n'est pas dans un des 10 pays avec les meilleures conditions, mais c'est possible.*

C : Qu'est-ce que vous pensez du rôle du gouvernement palestinien dans le support de l'entrepreneuriat en Palestine ?

*BS : Alors une fois encore le vocabulaire doit changer. Ce n'est pas le support, c'est l'inverse. Il y a zéro support car ils ne savent pas et ne veulent pas savoir ce qu'est une start-up. Alors quand la start-up se crée, légalement, elle doit payer des taxes dès le premier jour. Alors que partout dans le monde, les start-ups sont exemptées car tout le monde sait que les start-ups dépensent plus qu'elles ne gagnent. On doit aussi envoyer notre financial statement chaque année. Je comprends que ce soit le cas pour les grandes entreprises car tout le monde doit savoir qui, quoi, où. Mais une start-up qui n'a pas assez d'argent pour continuer soi-même son activité doit en plus prendre du temps pour envoyer ce statement. Partout dans le monde les start-ups sont exemptées de cela pendant les 2 ou 3 premières années. Cela prouve qu'il n'y a pas de support. Mais c'est plus que ça. N'importe quelle personne qui veut rentrer dans une industrie ne peut pas le faire car l'industrie est contrôlée par quelqu'un du gouvernement. Et ça fonctionne comme une mafia. Il y a plusieurs secteurs dans le gouvernement et chaque secteur fonctionne comme une mafia. Il y a l'industrie de la construction, l'industrie de la communication... Ici ces industries sont séparées en fonction des groupes du gouvernement. Alors si je veux rentrer dans une industrie sous le contrôle d'un officiel du gouvernement, soit il rentre avec moi en tant que partenaire et alors ça ne sera plus ce que je veux que ce soit, soit il va faire en sorte que je ne puisse pas réussir car ça va faire de la compétition et ils n'aiment pas la compétition. Pour nous c'est une des raisons pour laquelle on a choisi le secteur de la restauration. Ce n'est pas qu'on a la passion des restaurants. Mais un des critères pour choisir parmi nos différentes idées c'était quel officiel est derrière quelle industrie. Et l'industrie de la restauration n'est pas contrôlée, c'est un des seuls free markets. Donc on s'est dit qu'au moins pour rentrer dans ce secteur, il n'y a pas d'officiels qui va nous dire "vous rentrez dans notre territoire".*

C : Vous considérez que les étudiants qui sortent de l'université sont aptes à devenir entrepreneurs ? Est-ce que le système éducatif est bon ?

*BS : Alors ça dépend car ce n'est pas juste le système éducatif, c'est tout ce qui va avec, l'environnement, les parents, les amis, le lieu de vie. Par exemple, à Birzeit, qui est la meilleure université palestinienne en termes de programming, en 4eme année, il y a quelque chose qui s'appelle le seminar. C'est un projet pratique. Celui qui étudie le marketing va aller dans une entreprise faire un market research, il pose le problème puis propose la solution et ensuite il est côté sur cela. Ça c'est un très bon exemple. Moi quand j'allais à l'université on avait ça pour les entreprises. Les entreprises venaient et nous expliquaient le*

*problème. Nos profs divisaient le problème en sous-section et chaque groupe devait choisir un des mini-projets. Après le prof rassemblait tous les mini-projets et renvoyait le projet final à l'entreprise. Dans ce système-là, nous, en tant d'étudiants, on travaille sur quelque chose qui est vrai, qui est réel, qui va être utilisé. L'entreprise a eu un contact direct avec les étudiants. Donc c'est aussi une opportunité pour les étudiants de se faire embaucher au sein de l'entreprise. On a aussi l'option de faire un projet tout seul. Ceux qui choisissent les projets solo s'affrontent dans une compétition. Des juges viennent et il y a ensuite de l'investissement dans les trois meilleurs projets. Ce n'est pas comme ça à Birzeit, là-bas quand tu fais le séminaire, ils le prennent et ils le mettent dans nos archives et personne n'a le droit de l'utiliser ou même le partager. Ces deux mondes-là sont très différents et la même personne qui va ici ou là-bas peut-être formée de manière très différente. Sinon au niveau éducation scolaire du lycée, c'est très basé sur l'information et pas sur les compétences ou l'analyse. Par exemple je te donne un livre et je te demande ce que Jean-Jacques Rousseau voulait dire. L'élève doit étudier mais pas analyser lui-même, ni comprendre. Cela est très problématique. Pour l'entreprise, tu dois être un criticism thinker. Tu dois toujours remettre tout en question. Si pendant 12 années dans ta vie on t'apprend à étudier, alors tu ne changeras pas ton environnement. La réalité elle est dynamique alors que la connaissance pure et dure ce n'est pas dynamique. Quelque chose que tu connais aujourd'hui peut avoir changé demain. Poser une question dans une école palestinienne ça te fait passer pour un imbécile qui ne comprend rien. Ça c'est une des choses qui me désolent le plus. Pour moi, celui qui pose une question, c'est celui qui comprend le plus.*

C : Et est-ce que vous pensez que l'entrepreneuriat peut changer la situation de la population et du pays en général ?

*BS : Bien-sûr. La Palestine maintenant a un niveau de production de 0%. Donc la Palestine est totalement dépendante de l'extérieur. Or, comme ça s'est passé l'année dernière, Israël peut ne pas verser les taxes qui sont dues à la Palestine. En plus de ça, Trump a décrété la fin de l'aide des américains et plusieurs ONG ont fermé. Au moment où on fait quelque chose que nos donateurs, les français, les allemands ou n'importe qui, n'aiment pas, voilà il n'y a plus d'argent et on est foutu. Alors que si on a cet entrepreneuriat et ces entreprises on serait producteur. Et si les donateurs nous menacent de ne pas nous verser d'argent, on peut leur répondre qu'on n'en a pas besoin. Alors que maintenant même si on n'est pas d'accord avec les donateurs, on est obligé de se plier à leurs envies car sinon on risque de ne pas avoir de pain le jour suivant.*

C : Et selon vous y a-t-il pour la diaspora un rôle à jouer dans le soutien de l'entrepreneuriat ?

*Bien-sûr. Il y a beaucoup de la diaspora qui vivent dans des conditions misérables mais il y en a aussi beaucoup qui vivent dans de très bonnes conditions. La diaspora palestinienne en Amérique Latine est*

*l'une des plus puissantes. Et il y a déjà beaucoup de personnes de la diaspora qui aident ici. Par exemple un privé qui a amassé une grande richesse et qui vit au Honduras va venir ici pour donner 2 millions de dollars par an. D'autres créent des prix. Ne fût-ce que toutes les relations commerciales internationales qui sont établies entre des Palestiniens d'ici et ceux de la diaspora sont très utiles. La diaspora joue déjà un grand rôle mais un soutien minimum de la part du gouvernement pourrait augmenter exponentiellement l'aide de la diaspora.*

C : Pour revenir à Azmeh, est-ce que ce projet est complètement enterré ou est-ce que réfléchissez à le relancer, voire à créer d'autres projets qui s'attaquent aux conséquences de l'occupation ?

*BS : Alors non ce n'est pas enterré. Tout ce qui me gêne maintenant ça gêne tous les palestiniens. En plus je sais que vu ma position privilégiée, il doit y avoir plein d'autres obstacles pour les autres que moi je n'ai pas. C'est comme ça qu'est né Azmeh et c'est comme ça que peuvent naître d'autres projets. C'est juste que la prochaine fois que je veux m'attaquer à un problème, je dois le faire comme il faut. Je ne veux rien faire avant d'être sûr d'avoir tous les outils, une équipe et des opportunités.*

C : Et les charges contre vous ont été abandonnées quand vous avez fermé Azmeh ?

*BS : Oui oui.*

Bethlehem Business Incubator – Fayrouz Khoury

Claire Coppée : C

Fayrouz Khoury : FK

C: Let's talk about your background. What inspired you to work in the field of business and economics development?

*FK: First of all, I am a graduate of Bethlehem University with a MBA in Business Administration. I have a master in international cooperation and development. I worked in the public sector and the private sector for 10 years. I was the deputy general manager of the Chamber of Commerce and industry. During those 10 years i worked with small and medium enterprises I worked with start-ups but in an unsustainable and informal way. I also worked as a board member for the BBI. It happened that the manager resigned so because I have some experience with incubators I took (I had worked in the incubator of the university of ...) so they asked me if I could resign from the board and manage the incubator. They couldn't find a manager, so I came. I will also give you some background of the incubators because I guess that is one of the becoming questions. The incubator was established as a part of a project called beade and it spells for Business Economic Excellence And Developing Enterprises. It is a "10 years" project and it was founded by the US department of States. It was*

*implemented in cooperation between "ngm" university and Bethlehem University. The ownership of the incubator now goes for the Bethlehem University and the cooperation has just ended. Actually, it was terminated because of the political tensions, let's say that. During those 3 years we incubators 10 start-ups. That was the target or the objective of the project to make 10 start-ups from different sectors. It's a business incubator, it's not an ICT incubator or a specialized incubator. It's supposed to incubator start-ups from all the sectors. We use to provide different services for the start-ups, mainly consultancy and technical assistance and export 10000 dollars. So, one part of this project is the incubator and the other part is spreading a "defender of the entrepreneurship in Betlehem, so we use to provide or organize workshops. For students in school in rural areas to encourage them to apply for BBI if they have an interesting idea. In addition to the workshops in different youth centres, we use to organize public workshops periodically, every 2 or 3 months. Every time we select a topic that is really a hard topic. People usually come in tens to attend these workshops. It's usually a topic that is related to business and we encourage people through these workshops as well to apply for the incubation at the BIN if their idea is really entrepreneurial and special. Also, part of the project, the umbrella of BEEADE, there is at Bethlehem University the minor in entrepreneurship and they are working on the accreditation for this minor from the ministry of education. So, all these components I talked you about are part of BREADS project.*

C: About your way of functioning, how is BBI financed now?

*FK: It was completely financed by the project, the donation money, everything. But now we are part of Bethlehem University according to the agreement of the project. The ownership goes to Bethlehem University and the university should be able to spend money on the salaries, on our activities. But unfortunately, we are still negotiating this with the university. And we are waiting for an Italian project now. Things are a bit vague now. We are trying our best to clear up the sky and work according to the sustainability plan that we prepared earlier but things are not that easy so far.*

C: So, you said earlier that you were financed before by the US department of State, what do you think more globally about the international support, is it always positive for the Palestinian entrepreneurship?

*FK: Yes, if you 're talking exclusively about the entrepreneurs, the money is always positive. But at the same time, some money is spent mainly without a revenue or added value. And if you compare the amount of money spent on the projects with what you get back from those projects usually the gap is really big. So, the money spent on entrepreneurship or economic projects is not usually rewarding but*

*we always say it's better than nothing. But I would like to clarify that I am talking in terms of effects for those projects.*

C: Is generally the access to funding an obstacle for the start-up founders?

*FK: You are now talking about the obstacles. I usually split the obstacles in two parts. The first part is more related to the obstacles facing the incubators and the other part is about the obstacles facing the start-ups. The incubators usually face the obstacles facing the economic situation in Palestine in general. The political instability, the economic instability. Everyone is facing these issues, not only the incubators first of all. Second, the incubation in Palestine is a new concept and people are still struggling to understand the meaning of entrepreneurship. So the incubator is just a trend right now and people in incubators and their staff are using trial and error to see what serves the start-ups in terms of services. In different parts of the world it's different. Here it's a business incubator it should be a more specialized incubator. You can't incubate an industrial start-up, along with a services start-up along with an agricultural start-up, I mean this is not possible. There is no bunch of regular services or volume minimal of regular services that could apply to all these start-ups. So, this is another obstacle. Third obstacle is that it is difficult to identify very professional consultants. Usually we outsource consultancy and sometimes the reputation of those consultants is way overrated and when we deal with them, we realize they are a little bit unprofessional and as good as we used to think they are. This is mainly another thing. In addition, I would say that incubators usually depend on donation's money. They are usually not income generating departments for any university. The universities are not willing to spend money on incubators. They are always waiting for donors' money. That's why incubators are treated as importance departments, yet as a selective department. They are not willing to spend money to improve the services of the incubators. Also, the government doesn't have really a body that really takes care the incubators. It's the higher council for entrepreneurial activities. But it's activities are a little bit limited and it doesn't contribute financially to the sustainability months incubators. So this is mainly related to the incubators. Also I would like to add to this point that they aren't really trained or professional staffs who have experience in running incubators. Usually it's a trial and error process. It's only me who had the chance to take a course about the different types of incubators in France and inhale a very little background about incubators through this course. The others are just appointed or selected and it's a trial and error process. This is another thing. Speaking about the start-ups, they face the limitations that many young people are facing when establishing their businesses. For example, it's usually the laws in Palestine, the education system, that doesn't support the entrepreneurial thinking and the creative thinking. Now the institutional system is changing a little bit and it's still not entrepreneurially friendly. Second point is that the laws do not really encourage start-ups to launch their businesses because the amount of money you have to pay to register a start-up is almost the same*

amount you have to pay to register a company. So there are no incentives for the start-ups. I would also like to add that the lack of commitment for the start-ups themselves is an issue. Mainly because those are "fake" projects. The start-ups or entrepreneurs come, they say for example "well if it happens it happens, if it doesn't it's fine" because they haven't paid anything, they haven't contributed. So the thing is that once they pay or contribute, they are more committed. That's why we ask them always to sign a contract at the beginning of their incubation period that they should be committed. If they are absent three times in a row without valid reason, we immediately drop them off to take other people because we don't want to deprive other people from the opportunity. One more thing facing the start-up is the registration process. It's sometimes really difficult. It's costly. It's always the launching in Palestine that is difficult, not only the start-ups. It's the political situation, the economic situation, we are uncertain about everything. So it's a risky situation for every person that wants to open a business.

C: So I guess you agree that the political situation due to the Israeli occupation is a major obstacle for the Palestinian entrepreneurial ecosystem?

FK: *Of course!*

C: On the short and long term, what do you anticipate to be the impact of BBI and other incubators on the region, the population?

FK: *Do you want the honest answer or the corrected one?*

C: The honest one, please.

FK: *The honest one is that I don't see that the incubators will make really a high impact because out of let's say 10 start-ups you will find only one if we are lucky that will be operating in one year. The chance of creating more job opportunities, which is the main mission of all incubators is unfortunately difficult to achieve. The impact will be very minimum.*

C: And what are the strengths of the Palestinian entrepreneurial ecosystem?

FK: *I am not sure there are. Actually, I don't want to be pessimistic, the trial and error process has a bit improved the way the ecosystem is working. There is more harmony now between the investment, the institutional, the start-ups, the small loans institutions and the government. I think things are getting more organized in terms of each key player in the ecosystem.*

C: If you had the decision power and if you were the government, what first thing would you do to improve the situation?

FK: *First of all, I would like to come back to something that is very interesting and that plays a role in Palestine. Palestine evolves mainly by culture, not by religion. In our culture, so that you can*

*understand, the background, we are a very educated community. The illiteracy rate is only 4 to 5 percent and the literacy rate is 94 or 95 percent. So, education is very very important for Palestinians. To see someone who has dropped of from school, even if he becomes a very successful businessman, they will always say "this one has not completed his BA degree" or "he dropped out of school". It's a shame! So it is very important to start planting among children that it's not always your mission in life to have a BA degree. I mean you can go to technical and vocation education, the professional degree. You don't have to always have an academic degree. If the child is not good at school, not all children are smart, why in hell should he suffer at school or at the university to get a degree while he can go out there with a smart idea and make a lot of money? It's the school in general that we should start changing, the educational system. As a government member, I would change the curricula to become encouraging for the youth to think outside the box, in a more creative way. Not only study and go to the exam and vomit what you have studied. It's not a way of educating, its a way of teaching. It will not be useful for you in your life. I would encourage people who have an idea, even if they don't have a university degree to submit their idea to any incubator, or even to banks to get a loan.*

C: Is the access to funding more difficult because of the political situation? Do the lenders lend less money to Palestinians because of the political situation?

FK: *Yes definitely. It's also difficult for young people in particular to have access to finance because they need as very strong collateral. There is no incentive to at least ease the regulation about this for start-ups.*

C: What do you think I should ask to the other interviewees?

FK: *Ask them about the impact, "how many start-ups have you graduated and how many are still working right now?". It's important for you to understand that there is a difference between incubators. Incubators incubating social start-ups are for example different from others, its different than incubating entrepreneurial start-ups. For example, we as BBI, don't incubate social businesses. One of the very creative social business ideas that took part to BBI was a group of young men and women who make accessories of recycled material. Its a great project and its really creative. But it doesn't create a lot of job opportunities and it won't generate a lot of money. It's considered more like a hobby than like a real business. So we didn't incubate that project. What we are looking for as an incubator is creative projects, entrepreneurial projects and ideas that have a potential of making money and creating jobs. Other incubators for example opened a shop for handicapped people and they gave them incibation services. Thats why i told you that the concept of incubator in Palestine is misused. So if you talk about real incubators, I mean there are like 10, 12 incubators in Palestine, real incubators can't exceed 3 or 5 incubators.*

Flow – Ninaru Shtayyeh & Imam Hithnawi

Claire Coppée: CC

Imam Hithnawi: IH

Ninaru Shtayyeh: NS

[Un problème de connexion internet nous oblige à recommencer deux fois l'appel]

NS: *Ok se we all have a bad connection here in Palestine so I think it will be better if we turn our camera off. OK so starting with Palestine, I don't know if you know much about the history of Palestine. So, Palestine has been under occupation by Israel, and it isn't only political, it's also economical. It has basically put a lot of restrictions on what we do in Palestine. So, if you're trying to start a business, there are a lot of restrictions that will not allow you to either got your product outside of the country or to import the components. If you want to import a product from China, for example, it has to cross 3 places. It has to cross the Jordan custom, the Israeli custom and the Palestinian custom which limits a lot the trade. We also have problem with unemployment so unfortunately you can mention that the unemployment for the youth (from 19 to 29) reached 49 %. So, we were a group of seven people and we were discussing the idea of starting place that can host other businesses and can help out throughout the process, whether the financial process, the legal process, the governments process, all of that. We basically wanted a solution to that problem, and we started a one stop shop for the skills and resources necessary for entrepreneurs; all the skills, resources they need to be able to start and establish their start-ups and their businesses. We were meaning to create a sustainable Palestinian economy and a sustainable ecosystem that can basically host those initiatives. So, we have started our first cycle, we are still a newly established incubator and accelerator. We opened up the applications in June 2018. We spent 35.000 on a marketing campaign because we didn't really know where our expectations were. We did our research, we understand that there is a huge need for an incubator to be opened in a different way and which operates in a different way. We are seven young people, some of us have experience in the workforce and labor force and others do not. Three of us are freshly graduates. And it will help us start and do a unique thing that isn't found in the markets. The unique thing is that we are all considered youth. We operate in the same mentality youth operates. We are registered as a nonprofit company, but we do believe we should act as a start-up because the only way to reflect the mentality of a start-up is by acting like one. So, when we opened the applications, we received 115 applicants that had great ideas, and that have experienced working with incubators to develop their ideas and hopefully recruit some investors. Unfortunately, after a research and studies, we found out that there is not one start-up that has actually achieved the prospects of results they were*

looking for, even though we have almost 22 incubators in Palestine that do almost the same thing. We also found a gap in the market: not a lot of the start-ups are reaching their series A and series B and other successive rounds of the investment, so we saw that we should fill a gap of between entrepreneurs and investments. So, we short listed the 115 applicants, it was an internal short listing. We got 40 applicants, we conducted interviews over Skype, and we've shortlisted again and filtered those 40 applicants to 20 applicants. We started with them one week of generic sessions, that we called coaching week. So, we brought coaches from Palestine, and international ones. They were there to help the young entrepreneurs with their ideas. So, at the end of this week, the flow team started with the start apps that were accepted in the coaching week and we coached them for their pitches. At the end of the week there was a pitching day with the coaches. Some of them were investors, some others were working in venture capitals, other ones were CEOs with successful stories, some of them were from the donor's world. We tried to have basically evaluations of judges to be able to come with the best feedback possible for their start-up. We basically gave the judges the criteria and they had to judge blindly. They decided which start-up had the best speech for the program. We basically started with three months of incubation and we brought into 6 start-ups. We worked on business and product development and personal development. So business development, we were talking about the technical aspects of the product that was produced or the idea of the product. We also did a lot personal development because we do believe in the team and its power to actually achieve its goals. During the incubation, there also were some national and international mentors. We had 2 or 3 sessions. We had one generic session and we also had specific sessions where the start-ups were in on-to-one meetings with some mentors and discussed in detail their ideas. We as a flow team we also had some meetings with the start-ups to discuss the deliverables that were put and expected at the end of each week during the incubation. We also have some generic events and public events where we invited some entrepreneurs from the ecosystem as a whole, because we do value the community spirit, and spreading awareness about entrepreneurship world and the start-up world. As we aim to have a start-up scene in Palestine in the next few years, a scene that has a lot of traction and can bring in good investments to the country. As an example of the public events we organize, we had Google for Start-ups that for example came to visit us. This month they are coming again to make the follow-up. We also bring Amazon into the country for the very first time. We had other events where we brought entrepreneurs that have the necessary experience to just tell their stories and spread awareness about this world. After that we went to the acceleration phase, we started recently. We actually were able to get pre-seed investment for three of our start-ups and we are hoping to recruit the other three that we incubated. We are now working with them by putting milestones at the end of each period, and we are hoping to make them reach their sustainability, and also connecting them with people from their

sectors, research, getting data, getting the necessary information and making sure they are right on tracks.

IH: *Ok so this was our story from one year to now. We can't really say how the next five years will be because it depends on the start-ups we'll incubate and the personalities of the entrepreneurs. Now we know exactly what's the gap we are going to fit. We've had a lot of struggle, a lot of challenges, a lot of experience from the inside, from the occupation. Now we are about to launch the next step which is going to be different. We'll work with different incubators, with a VC from California, from Jordan, from Egypt, from UK, US and Mexico. We'll help as much as you can to network. For example, if one start-up wants to export to Egypt, they can get advice from the funding partner from Egypt. About the struggles of our ecosystem, we have for example the fact that we meet so many people with good ideas but most of them don't know how to pitch their ideas. We can help them as much as we can. Before we started to develop our activities, we started to have a partnership with MassChallenge, which is one of the most famous accelerators in the world, so we now have good practices. We customized what we learned for the Palestinian minds. One of the issues is that we don't have a mature ecosystem, maybe it will be mature in two or three years, I don't know. The second problem is the occupation. When we want to create a product, we make a SWOT analysis and other analysis to know how we can make of the threat an opportunity, we are trying to find solutions. But occupation is a huge challenge because they can destruct our ideas. That is why we focus on start-ups in high-tech, because this way you can easily sell your product to Saudi Arabia or anywhere else. Moreover, you can use the Cloud and on the Cloud, there is no restriction. You have to adjust your product in function of the occupation.*

NS: *We also have a problem with the legal framework. So, we don't have a legislation that works with the start-ups, rather than that, we have a legislation that put obstacles in front of the start-ups. That is because there is a lack of awareness on the topic. We try to meet with other key actors of the ecosystem, CEOs, accelerators, lawyers, judges... to try to frame a st.*

IH: *The Palestinian law comes from 1964, it developed a little bit from that moment, but it's not even mentioned in the law that there is something called core technologies. So we are advising our start-ups to register in the US, or in Cyprus or Estonia, so they can have their rights with their ideas and the operations that they do. Another problem we have is the gate. They just gave us the 3G one year ago. And the technologies are very fast, and you can't control that.*

NS: *I did mention that the occupation had an economic, social, cultural, ... impact. But when I say that there is an economic occupation, that means it is really restricting every project we have. Unfortunately, Palestinians do not have access to land, they have limited access to water, to infrastructure, to capital,*

*and to access to professional people. The professional people often go abroad, or they are even recruited in Israel as cheap labour because Israel has a higher minimum wage than Palestine. We also don't have a currency in Palestine, which is also a huge problem. We use three currencies, the Jordanian dinar, the American dollar, and the Israeli shekel. We do not have control over our own money. Moreover, when a product has to cross the customs they would stop at the Israeli custom and you have to pay for the time your product stays on custody, you have to pay for the storage of your product, and you have to pay the taxes and the entry fees. We have a lot of initiatives here, and we have professional experience, passionate entrepreneurs that want to show the world what they can do. That's why technology is kind of a solution to enable entrepreneurs to forget the tough reality they are living. Technology is the language of the world, it's limitless, borderless and no one can stop it. This way we can sell Palestinian products to the whole world and bring back money in here. Technology also may improve the living standards of the population.*

*So yes we face a lot of challenges. And Gaza, the open-air prison, faces even more challenges. But Gaza Sky Geeks can talk to you about that. We haven't been there because we are not allowed but we know that they just have electricity three hours a day. Imagine working for software, applications or websites how hard it must be.*

*We also have another problem which is not related to the occupation, it's that we don't have an understanding of the start-up mentality. We talk about not having a strict law helping start-ups, but every step is so difficult. For each step, getting money, registering, ... the entrepreneur has to go through 5 or 6 entities following the Palestinian Authority. Unfortunately, it's a new world for the PA so it's hard for them to understand all the needs of the start-ups. Sometimes it takes 5 or 6 months to take a step. But imagine if you're engaged with a donor, these long waiting periods make our entrepreneurs really unattractive, and our economy also. We also have problems in the agricultural sector. Most of the Palestinian land is getting confiscated. We have Palestinian farmers that have left from working in their land to go working in more industrial sectors or even in Israeli settlements. The agricultural labor force in Palestine has lost 500.31 thousand farmers in the last five years which is a huge number if you know how much agriculture is boosting our economy. If you go more into education, we have 44.000 qualified and experienced teachers that apply every year to the Ministry of Education for the recruitment test. If they pass it they can become teachers. Most of them pass, but because we have limited employment, they only take 2000 out of the 44.000 that apply. Most of the educated professionals are just waiting home doing nothing. And that's where Flow is coming up. Flow tries to introduce a new concept, a new method, a new approach that encourage people to, instead of waiting for an employer to employ them, go for self-employment. If we're talking and medicine, people from the sector can create a platform for the health insurance or come with a product that helps autism and*

*ADHD and other diseases. If we are talking about the educational sector, we can have someone that creates a new platform for school, for online courses. That could be useful for the whole Middle East. We're trying to spread awareness, it's a challenge. It's very hard to convince someone that it's possible to leave its 9am-5pm job to go for entrepreneurship by yourself. We don't have traction for international investors. They know that this market is a risky market. So, we would like to help the entrepreneurs to start here and then they'll be able to scale up in the whole world.*

*So, yes, we are trying to give you as much information as possible, but do you have any questions?*

C: Yes, that's perfect. I had a list of questions to ask you, but you nearly answered all of them. I have one more question about your financing. How do you finance the project?

NS: *So, this is our first year. We got funds as a donation from the Danish Embassy, as a part of the Denida. We partnered with them and they helped us with the establishment and the begin of the creation of Flow. We do have a long-term and a short-term sustainability plan with revenues. But our revenues of course come along with the success of one start-up at the beginning. So now we are still relying on the donation, but we would like to create a new company, a profitable one, that will invest itself in other start-ups and collaborate with other venture capital funds around the world to help the Palestinian economy get well established.*

IH: *So, Flow is going first to give a lot of trials, so it can decide with which kinds of start-ups we will work. The next year we'll have a sustainability mode, a short-term and long-term one. The short-term is that we take the money from the investors, we choose good ideas that investors might be looking for, and then we manage the investment, which means we manage the opportunity. The long-term is that we take an amount from every start-up as a founder agreement, and each start-up will have a team member that can, all the time, recruit for it, fundraise for it and manage its public relations. So one of our partner will be all the time remoted for every summit, every seminar, every thing happening in the world that remote our start-up, our portfolio. We have to be sustainable by the fourth year.*

NS: *For us being early adopters for technology and being up to date of what's happening globally is really important. We believe that there will be a success story that will come from Palestine in that sector and we believe this is the time for Palestinian entrepreneurs to excel in their ideas. If you want to elaborate more on one of the points, let us know.*

Gamiphy – Ramzi Barakat

Claire Coppée: C

Ramzi Barakat: RB

RB: *Thank you so much for doing this, you know. I think it's very important to talk about these things. So, we thank you too, of course.*

C: Thank you! So can you tell me a little bit more about your background? What were you doing before Gamiphy?

RB: *So, I'll just tell you actually about our team. Because it may be more interesting.*

*I'm a Palestinian that lives abroad. I was born and raised outside the Palestine. I decided to move to Palestine because I had no family left there. I lasted to see my country. So, I did that for the first time last year. I am 26 years old. So when I was 25 last years, it was the first time visiting my country and I met a few people who had started this project called Gamiphy. They were born and raised in Palestine. They started this project, I Joined them as a founder, and I stayed there. I went for a visit and then I decided to live there. Now, I work remoted. I travel throughout Palestine and I work based where my family lives, which is in Kuwait. The rest of the team is still based in Ramallah. And our CEO actually has moved to Chile, Santiago Chile, because the Chilean government has invested in Gamiphy. So right now, we kind are all over the places, you know?*

C: Yes. All right. So, what inspired you to work at Gamiphy?

RB: *To work with Gamiphy? Because I really liked the business concept, I had already worked in this business where we needed this type of solution because, we are marketing solution for businesses. It was something I believed in. I felt kind of proud to be part of this start up that was going to employ so many Palestinians. You know that occupation is hard to control but if we are able to improve the economy with starts up and private sector, it's a great way to fight the occupation and peaceful way.*

C: Can you briefly explain what Gamiphy's mission and functioning are?

RB: *Yes, Gamiphy is a digital loyalty program for businesses to help them acquire and retain customers. So, an ecommerce and online business can use our loyalty system and customize it to meet their business's needs. That's a quick but good summary. Obviously, there is other details that you need but I think it's a good summary.*

C: OK, how many people are now working for Gamiphy?

RB: *We are 12 people*

C: And at the beginning, what did it take to turn this idea into a business. What were the key challenges along the way?

RB: *Well, in Palestine, lots of people complain that there is no access to money. You know the ecosystem, the start-up ecosystem, is not the most developed. I don't think it's a major issue to get money these days, you know, we can access not only the Palestinian market but also other markets in the region. So the first challenge was to be able to develop the idea, find the right people, the "right talent" that would be able to develop something like this, and once we found the right people, the challenge was to convince the investor, called Multi Carfa which invested in Palestinian start-ups. The start-up has to be at least 51% owned by Palestinians. They invested now in 60 start-ups. We are one of them. First, they invested 50.000 \$ to be able to develop the whole product assistance and develop the system, 4.000 \$ extra since their reception 3 years ago.*

C: In Gamiphy?

RB: Yes

C: And how is it called exactly?

RB: *The name of that Park is called Multi Carfa. I can wright it to you by Skype if you want.*

C: Ah no, I think I have read something about that. OK, I know. Thank you. And at the beginning did you use the services of an incubator, of accelerator or of any other kind of support?

RB: *I wouldn't say we used their services. We used their space. We have an organization called "Leaders". They have a nice space that we use. We also had some employees who live in Rawabi. Then a coworking 'space they call Connect. And then we went to events. There is a incubator called Flow in Ramallah. They have a lot of events and they collaborate with Gaza Sky Geeks.*

C: What comes next for Gamiphy, for example in the next five years?

RB: *To be honest we don't think that far ahead. We recruit more people, we also want to accelerate abroad. We are focusing on the Chilean market, that happens to have to biggest Palestinian community: 500 000 Palestinians are living there.*

C: What is Gamiphy making the world/Palestine a better place?

RB: *We are extremely passionate about the business that we are doing. We truly believe that it is going to help other businesses to become more successful and to create loyal customers because it is a very competitive industry now. We are trying to help each business building loyal customers and not just increasing their sale. That's our motto. Although, we now get to politic, what we are trying to do is always look at Palestinian talents. We are able to hire employees from any country. We already have some employee in India and Spain, but whenever we look at certain job description, we always prioritize hiring a Palestinian person.*

C: To what extent do the Israeli occupation impose constraints on Gamiphy's creation and everyday business?

RB: *Actually, until I got there, I didn't understand the huge implication on the start-up. I'll give you just some example of daily struggle. I think about the daily struggle, the worst things, the checkpoints we have. Our CEO is from Natis. He has to come from Natis to Ramallah every day which should take 30 minutes. It takes an hour and a half because of the bad roads and the traffic.*

*We have had many issues where settlers from near Natis would come out and go home on Palestinian cars. They have to leave office early to be able to make it home safe before 9pm, many, many times. Always make us mentally instable and distract us. Also, for myself, since I have no Palestinian ID. I have to leave the country every 3 months because I only have a visit visa from Israel. The last time I tried to enter, they rejected me at the border. So, I am now actually blacklisted. So, I am not allowed to enter. But before that, they would interrogate me about 6 hours each time. It was always discouraging to board to another country to increase our business because we were a hassle of traveling, you know. And the top of all this, it is the economy of Palestine that's struggling, so, people don't want to invest in Palestine, even Palestinian or Arabs. The start-ups have a lot of issues raising money. So, usually, venture-capital funds are able to raise about 20 million dollars or 30. IBTIKAR can do halve of that because it's very risky to invest in Palestine because of the occupation, it's very risky to live there, the salaries are extremely low as hard do the Palestinian to work hard, because, you know, the return on their investment is very low.*

C: What do you think the role of the Palestinian government should be in the support of the entrepreneurship?

RB: *They need to cooperate with the private sector. So right now, I don't want to get over corruption because I don't know how much corruption there is. I know that the Palestinian government depends on a lot of aids. They depend on US aid, they are struggling to pay salaries. The salaries already are not be paid on time, sometimes not paid them full for the public sector. There is a lot of nonefficiency. We have a Palestinian ministry of aviation, of travel but we don't have any airport. This shows you that there is nonefficiency. It does not make sense. They could allocate those resources and cooperate with the private sector. I have my families bound in the welfare association, they call it Taawon. This is a privately bounded that tries to fund any project in Palestine, not necessary entrepreneurship but schools and hospitals and now they try to enter the entrepreneurship sector. But the problem that we have in Palestine is the lack of cooperation between entities, so the welfare is not very good, not cooperating with the government or the government does not like to have such entities, like the welfare in power with so much funds. IBTIKAR is probably the most capable of investing and funding start-ups,*

*so it should be helpful if they cooperate with the welfare to get access to the funds. I think what's lacking is the cooperation among the different sectors, between private sector, NGOs and public. They need to go hand in hand whereas now they are all separate and they are trying to achieve their own goals, while they are kind of common goals. Maybe it happens because of some power issues they all want, I don't know. But as a Palestinian entrepreneur I would like to see them work all together.*

C: So, according to you, the entrepreneurial ecosystem is not working really good right now in Palestine?

RB: *Well, it's good because the Palestinian talent is good. We have a lot of skills, the problem is the lack of access to mentorship, funds, and the healthy environment. That could be created in spite of the occupation.*

C: You told me you didn't study in Palestine, but I read some things about Palestinian studies. According to you are Palestinian students ready to become entrepreneurs after graduation?

RB: *Well based on my experience of dealing with Palestinians in the start-up, I think they are more than ready. I don't think any university in the world can prepare you to become entrepreneur even if there is an entrepreneurship class or option. It's all about practice. Becoming entrepreneur depends a lot on your character, rather than on the education. And you know there are a lot of obstacles that come with creating a start-up, and Palestinians are used to live with a lot of obstacles, and they are used to solve problems. So yes I think the educational system is good.*

C: Do you think that the Palestinian entrepreneurial ecosystem could improve the population's and country's situations?

RB: *Yes totally. 100%. I think it's actually the only way. Right now, the current situation with the occupation and how expensive the country is with the public sector which is not solvable, the only way to improve the economy is in my opinion through the private sector and the start-ups.*

C: Do you think that the Palestinian diaspora has a role to play in the support of entrepreneurship?

RB: *Well I consider myself as a diaspora member. I have an American degree, I lived in Spain, I have a high education, and a lot of the diaspora people have the same profile. I don't think it was my responsibility to do so. But it was a way of giving back to Palestine. Some people are not able to donate which is normal. But it is possible to support Palestinian economy not just through donation, educated Palestinians have for example skills in law, so they can give law workshops in Palestine. There is a lot to do there, sharing their expertise, their knowledge with the Palestinians living inside would be a great*

*way to give back, not through money because money dies. I don't like to say it is a responsibility, but if they are capable, then it's their duty.*

C: I understand. And what would you put in place to lead the change if you were the government? You already mentioned the cooperation, but I don't know if you have another idea.

RB: *Well you know our president is 84 years old. We haven't had elections since the last president in 2005. We are supposed to have elections every four years but every four years they just reelect him. The politicians in power are much older than the population. And it's natural that in every society new ideas and even entrepreneurship comes from the youth. If we don't have democracy and we are not able to elect new leaders, then it stops the development. I take my family business in Kuwait as an example. My father is a wise man, but he is also fatigue, and he is not able anymore to innovate. So that's where he can step aside and share his knowledge with youth and let the youth take the lead. And that's not happening in Palestine.*

C: And international support plays a great role in Palestine, but do you think it is always positive, including for entrepreneurs?

RB: *Compared to other countries it is really easy to get access to money. And I don't think it impedes the creation here in Palestine. Because at the same time there is only one VC to access and it's not that easy to get funding. So many founders found their start-up without any funds.*

C: Well that was my last question. Would you like to add something?

RB: *Your questions covered all I wanted to say. But what I would like to highlight is that the solution for Palestine is to empower start-ups. And the occupation is not the only obstacle. And Palestine can still grow the economy in spite of the occupation.*

Iris – Ayman Arandi

Claire Coppée: C

Ayman Arandi : AA

C: What was your background before Iris?

AA: *I did my studies in Jaffa university in Naplouse and I graduated from computer engineering. After graduation I worked in different sectors, like telecom and development of mobile applications, program and so on. Then I established Iris Solutions and then I did a master in London in management.*

C: What inspired you to create Iris?

AA: *First I wanted to create something that can be helpful to people. I wanted to be independent because there is always something attractive about managing your own business and being your own boss. At the same time, I saw there is an opportunity in order to offer services, there is a need in the market that we can answer and make money out of that.*

C: Can you briefly explain what Iris's mission and functioning is?

AA: *Of course. We provide a relaxing tool for sensitive environment for education and rehabilitation purposes. These rehabilitant environments we offer there to schools, kindergartens, clinics and hospitals that offer a safe environment which can stimulate communication between the teacher or therapist with the child and help to boost process of rehabilitation. We do that by creating a controllable space of lights, music and visuals that create easy to absorb sensations which can relax or stimulate based on the needs of the child or his conditions.*

C: It seems really interesting. How many people are now working for Iris solutions?

AA: *We are a team of 15 people.*

C: At the beginning, what did it take to turn the idea into a business? What were the key challenges along the way?

AA: *Like any start-up, I think. It took a lot of time, of hard work and belief. It also took a lot of patience. The challenges like any other start-up around the world: funding is one of them, having the right talent or the right skills to do manage your business. Something about Palestine and Iris is that we work with components. We are a technology company which also works with components. So, it's really hard to import or export because we have to import through the Israeli borders which always create extra costs and unpredictable shopping time and lot of procedures that sometimes cost delay which leads to cancellation of projects. That is a very big challenge that is really specific. Most of the technology or start-up businesses, not only in Palestine but in the whole Middle East is focused on software, and they don't need the hardware, but we do.*

C: Did you use the services of an incubator, accelerator or any other support organization at the beginning?

AA: *At the very beginning there was some sort of entrepreneurship program in Palestine that was offered by PICTI which is the Palestinian ICT incubator. And we benefited from the program in training but not in cash. We also were part of a program for an organization in Palestine part of the ecosystem for early stage called Enayzak from which we received couple of thousands as a competition. And we got into an accelerator through Google for Entrepreneurs in Palo Alto, called the Black Box three years*

*after we got established. What we've managed to do within Iris is that we focused at the very beginning on competitions and grants in order to secure the seed funding. When we started the ecosystem was not fully in place which made it difficult to raise a first funding. So we had to be creative and luckily for us, we were working in an innovative sector and we had our pattern technology that allowed us to access competitions for entrepreneurs, start-ups or creative ideas which allowed us to get couple of thousands every month in a while in order to help gap the financial needs. But at the same time Iris is an organic growth start-up. So we started with a very small initial investment from the three founders and so we were talking about 10 thousand dollars. Our strategy was whatever is coming from the company we would reinvest in the company. We are not distributing profit. The first 2 or three years we were working in other jobs in order to cover most of our expenses.*

C: So you think that generally the access to funding is an issue in Palestine more than elsewhere?

*AA: No, I think it's like everywhere. But Palestine is still a place where the ecosystem is not fully in place. It is the same as all the surrounding place, except for Israel which is way ahead. But if you compare to Lebanon or Syria, maybe Jordan is a little bit ahead, than I still think we are doing good. But one of the issues is that the money that goes into the sector comes from grants or donations, which cannot guarantee sustainability. So it took some time for venture capital and investors to get the courage to enter the sector. In conclusion, yes there are issues related to Palestine when we are talking about regulations or protections of the investors, or the unstable security system that are obstacles for investors to see Palestine as an attractive place. At the same time some investors manage to break this. More and more investors are coming. From my limited knowledge, regarding that, I believe most of our investors are from inside. We don't have many VCs from outside Palestine investing in Palestinian companies, except through a proxy like Israel that would bring some money but also that model is not working so much.*

C: Alright. What comes next for Iris solutions?

*AA: We're always expanding. Right now we are selling our services in Palestine in Jordan and in the Lithuanian market. We are testing it in Europe in order expand and to understand how to penetrate the market Our next step is to hopefully build a bigger hub for the Middle East in Jordan because it's nearly impossible to export to Palestine. We thought the best way to do it is to establish reserves in Amman in Jordan and that would be a distribution channel for the Middle East. We also want to make of Lithuania a distribution channel for Europe. We'll always improve, introducing new projects. Right now we have 200 tools across the market we serve. We have thousands of users, children and others benefitting from our technologies.*

C: You mentioned that you wanted to open in center in Amman, but will the headquarters of Iris remain in Palestine?

AA: *This is what we are trying to do, as much as possible. I understand that we want to keep the development in Palestine, in Ramallah because there is talent. We want to keep the company Palestinian in a way but we understand that if the pressure goes bigger we'll have to leave in The Middle East or in Europe, inshallah, we need to be smart on how allocating the resources but we wanna keep the development and the headquarters in Ramallah, even though I don't think it is the smartest choice. As part of our mission is to be part of a growing ecosystem in Palestine. Most of the SMEs would register in the US in order to have the protection for the investors and to benefit from international standards. But we are at a stage where we don't have any investors, we have the luxury to keep our headquarters in Palestine.*

C: To what extent did the Israeli occupation impose constraints on Iris creation and every day business?

AA: *Occupation affects every part of your life. Whether it is the business or even your personal life. To be specific it's again the point that I mentioned: exporting certain components. That makes it more expensive and harder. Another issue is the ability to move with the checkpoints between the cities. We have operations all across Palestine, even in Gaza, it's really hard to do something, to coordinate teams to deliver our services with the mobility issues. Actually even our main product was built in accordance to the occupation. We wanted to send our sensitive room to Gaza but none of us was able to get a permit. But we really wanted to make our sensitive project there, and in the refugees centres. It took so much time. We had contacts through Skype for months and it was very hectic and hard experience. But at the same time we thought that if we were able to come with a portable block easy to install in these places, then we would be able to offer our services all over the world. This is what we have done. After two years working in the sensory environment, we managed to come up with an alternatively small sensitivity box able to get a sensitivity environment in matter of minutes without the need of a special team to install it because usually the sensory room needed a team of 6 people working for 2 weeks to install it and it's quite expensive. It starts from 20000 thousands and it can go till 100 000. And we've managed to offer it through this product for around 5000 dollars which is a lot under the market price. So I can tell you before launching the sensitivity box we had 17 rooms which we have built in three years and after launching it it went crazy and we have launched 200 since the change that happened three years ago.*

C: What do you think about the role of the Palestinian government in the support of entrepreneurship?

AA: *I believe they are trying to support it. There are a lot of initiatives that are popping up. But the government has a lot of challenges to tackle in a growing country with an economy under occupation.*

*But there is a couple of pioneers who are working towards making it easier to register companies, giving water access, to invest in Palestine and putting regulations to stimulate innovation. Between when we started Iris seven years ago and now, I can see change. Not a lot of change, but from a government that is struggling that is maybe what they can do. Even though this must not be used as an excuse. I would like to see more work being done. We definitely can start criticizing saying it takes time and money to register, or that we have no protection as entrepreneurs. But it applies for all the economy, not only for entrepreneurship. Other than that, I say that if you're an entrepreneur, whether you are in Palestine or in California, you have some challenges ahead of you but also opportunities. In Palestine we for example have the luxury of being the only provider on the market, so the challenge here reduces competition which is good on one side but unhealthy on the other side. Back to the main point, yes, the government can do more but it's something that also the entrepreneurship ecosystem, the entrepreneurs and the investors can push more. I don't expect much from the government even if I hope to see more because there are things they can support. For example they have the Higher Council for Innovation and Excellency which offers support and organizes summits. We also have a couple of ministries who are aware of the meaning of start-ups and are ready to work with start-ups, like the ministry of education or the ministry of social affairs which we work with. Also, another couple of projects. But it's public sector, it's not private sector... I would expect the other people you interviewed to criticize the government but I prefer to say some good words about it.*

C: Which recommendations would you give to the government to improve the entrepreneurship's situation?

*AA: First making it easier to register a business, but also to exit a business. For example we don't have a bankruptcy law in Palestine. This law is actually lacking in the whole region because it is related to the culture. The culture of failure is still very hard in the mentality of people here. People find it very hard to fail. And even the law doesn't support the bankruptcy. Another thing is to promote more about the entrepreneurship's sector in Palestine. Making it easier for foreign investors, for example from the diaspora, to leverage and bring capital to the Palestinian entrepreneurial ecosystem. That would make a big difference. But at the same time moving money in and out Palestine is always regulated and monitored and controlled by Israel so this is another impact of occupation. Another thing that the government can do is incentivizing entrepreneurship, by entrepreneurship courses in schools and high schools. Starting talking about an early stage because that's not something we had in our curriculum. The universities are catching up with the world entrepreneurial start-ups but we would need social programmes or non profit organizations that would do competitions, incubators or accelerators. We definitely need more and more of that. We should look at the government programmes in Germany or*

*other countries for the last 19 years and do the same in Palestine. I think the plan is There, we just need to implement it.*

C: You mentioned the diaspora; do you think that it has a role to play in the support of entrepreneurship in Palestine?

*AA: Yes, but not only regarding entrepreneurship. I don't know if it is within the scope of your thesis but I believe we need to redefine the scope of who is Palestinian. We as Palestinians are 14 million. We have half of our nation around the world. Usually refugees a trial of entrepreneurship by default because they have been through a hard time and we have many amazing examples of intellectuals and successful people. But we are not able to unify this tremendous power and capital and culture so they have a big role in all aspects of Palestine. Many of the millionaires and couple of billionaires from the Middle East are originally Palestinians but I understand any capitalist or business man would assess the opportunities and when they look at Palestine they are not willing to take the risk. And that's were governments can play a role and give guarantees for investors. Me myself know at least 100 Palestinians which are working for top technology companies, Facebook, Google or whatever. Getting access to such expertise could very flourish the sector. And especially the freelancing sector. The outsourcing sector in Palestine is booming here since we have connection and affordable talent. Another think we could do is mobilizing and rebranding Palestine. Whenever people think about Palestine they think about stones and clashes and bombings, which is part of the story but also Palestine is 10000 years of culture and of talent. The diaspora has also the responsibility to represent Palestine around the world and give better image of it, which will attract investment and talent for the ecosystem.*

C: Do you think that the Palestinian entrepreneurship ecosystem could improve the population's and country's situation?

*AA: Of course, absolutely. I believe if we want to free Palestine and building a better future for Palestinians we need to work from the inside. The economic development is insanely important and is one of the conditions to be independent and be able to owe your own decision. We must stop relying on the foreign aid and donors money. That would give us the ability to create jobs but also affect the mentality of the people. The eternal aid really messed up with the head of people. We became receivers, this is what people are looking for. We need to incentivize this. Again, I truly believe we are a region of entrepreneurs. We managed to build civilizations and luckily, we are in place with a lot of resources. So entrepreneurship can help on an economical point of view, on a cultural and social point of view.*

C: Thank you, that was my last question. Would you like to add something?

*AA: There are a lot of successful stories that are coming in Palestine. The scene five years ago was really different from now. One other very important point related to the previous ones is that entrepreneurship is not only ICT. Entrepreneurship is a sector that can be everywhere. And the entrepreneurship branches you must focus on in Palestine is agriculture. When we moved half of our population stopped working in agriculture and moved to the public and service sector. We lost so much, we lost the essential pillar of what kept people independent. So one thing the government should do is focusing on the agriculture. Providing the farmers with supply chain services and helping them exporting fruit abroad.*

Mission – Dawoud Zahran

Claire Coppée: C

Dawoud Zahran : DZ

*DZ: Your interview is really interesting for me because one of the things my organization does is research. We are research oriented. We are trying to help start-ups and we will start recruiting around October. One of the things we do is to make sure that the start-ups we help are not coming up through donor priorities and/or opinions. We want the start-ups to have a real dig oriented approach to know what problems they want to solve, they want to take into this program etc. So your thesis is interesting because the information is actually lacking in a lot of ecosystems.*

C: First, as an introduction, what is your background? What inspired you to work in the field of business and development?

*DZ: So one of the things that led me to that was a fellowship that I did back in 2016 about entrepreneurship on Palestine. This is where I first interacted more with entrepreneurs in Palestine. After the fellowship I started a company with the group that was doing the fellowship with me. Then I was finishing my bachelor and I wanted to make my master in public policy in the UK. I finished that and now I've been back to Palestine for the last 10 months. And instead of joining an organization, I wanted to create one. Our organization is going to host 15 to 20 Palestinian tech start-ups to get created, grow and get skills in the Middle East region. So this is not only on the local market. We want to have a regional approach. So the start-ups that we support must be regionally oriented: the Middle East and North Africa region. All of this is very new. We are going to recruit in October for the first round. One thing that makes our organization unique and distinctive from other ones is that we are problem-driven, data-driven and inclusive. We want to be able to provide the necessary data but also to be pragmatic and realistic in our approach solving the issues the start-ups face in the ecosystem. We*

*also have a public policy background, a politics background so a mix between the policy and the business field.*

C: More specifically about the mission and functioning of the organization, what is different between your organization and incubators or accelerators?

*DZ: If we want to differentiate that when it comes to the Palestinian ecosystem, we don't have accelerators per se, we do have some coworking spaces and a few incubators. Within the global definition of what an accelerator is typically it's an entity that supports businesses from very early on with necessary funding, resources and connections. We do have some entities that are taking this direction but they were not really able to accomplish it. Also not many accelerators provide the needed amount of money necessary for start-ups to come true. Here we've been noticing that usually not many entities were giving enough money, the start-ups receive like 11000 USD which is definitely not enough if you wanna have a company that scales. So that's another thing you maybe want to highlight: many accelerators are not giving enough funding to actually achieve the access they could have achieved if they had received enough funding. But with us I don't like to use the technologies of incubator or accelerator. We are a start-ups support program. We don't reinvent the wheel, we try to fill critical gaps. So if there's an issue with data, we are trying to work with data. If there is an issue with Palestinians getting exposure to the global tech ecosystem, we make part of our accelerator program based on that. We saw that there is not an advocacy entity that advocates for Palestinian entrepreneurs, we are also going to do that. We won't do things the already have been done before or somebody has already interest in.*

C: And what do you anticipate the impact of the organization, and more globally of the entrepreneurship, having on the population and the country?

*DZ: When it comes to the Palestinian population?*

C: Yes, but also the MENA's population if you prefer.

*DZ: Yes that's a very important thing. We feel that the local market is not enough, so our focus market is the regional market. But for sure I think that a lot of things are going to change after the pilot here. We'll understand what things do we need to change. But let me tell you what I hope to get out of this. One of the truths we are having here is rather than counting revenue and successful start-ups, we count how many start-ups were created and how many entrepreneurs were supported. We cannot just calculate the start-up number. We just start understanding more and highlighting more which start-up succeeded. Rather than say "we had a program for the last 10 years where we supported 100 entrepreneurs and 35 start-ups", we should mention how many of them were successful. What we need*

to say is "We supported 15 start-ups. 10 of them failed. 5 of them succeeded and were able to generate 1 million dollars of revenue after three years of activity". That shows the failure percentage but also the success percentage. That nearly never happens in the start-ups world and that's something we want to get rid of. Now something else, we want to help create 15 to 20 start-ups in the next three years that have a regional approach. We also wanna help them grow and scale. It means we have to be able to support them after the acceleration program from the seed funding to the funding series A funding. We will provide them with seed funding at the moment where they won't have revenue and they will just be trying to prove their concept. But at the end of our acceleration program we want them to do the same: "we have that revenue we are growing at that percentage and we want extra funding to grow faster". That is success for us. We don't expect them to be profitable, but we want them to have a revenue. We are focusing on that as an organization and that's something that is not done here and neither in many other places. Also, beyond the accelerator we also have our advocacy branch. We wanna connect the Palestinian start-up ecosystem to the Palestinian public. The investment of the government in the start-up ecosystem is lacking because people don't see it as a viable sector. People here like to see their son and daughter employed, they want them to be job-secured. I understand that. But we need to have another mentality, it's not just about employed and unemployed, it's also about create and innovate. We want to put that kind of mentality. This is the case in many countries, including yours, if you are unemployed, you must not stay unemployed, you should create and innovate. And with the very high unemployment rate we have, it's a right environment for people to say "I hate my status quo and I want to change things". That is what our advocacy branch is going to help. We also want to use another measure: how many people we succeeded to employ. In high quality long term jobs. And we anticipate to be directly responsible of employing 75 to 100 people in the next three years.

C: Is there a specific profile of the projects you are going to help?

DZ: That's a great question. I think that one of the biggest mistakes the donor community has done is that it dictates what others should do. It's a very nasty approach to make people change their priorities for what the donors want to do. I think it really hurts Palestine. We don't want to work that way. What we want to do is supporting individuals who have been working for 7, 8 years, or it doesn't matter for how many years, and who have a job and thought "why shouldn't I start something on my own?", and who have ideas but are not taking them forward yet. If their idea is good, if there are good components in their project, we'll take it forward. This is our criteria, we just need motivated individuals with a good idea and some research that make an apply. The only restriction we have is that the appliers must have a Middle East and North African approach. If you want a pilot in Palestine that's fine, but the idea must be scalable in the whole region.

C: How do you fund the organization?

DZ: *That's a great question. It's also a characteristic of the nonprofit organizations. We did get our first ground funding which was a grant through an organization in Palestine. That was our first ground. Now we are trying to bit the necessary funding for the pilot. So we are doing a first fundraiser. We did get some funding, but we need to work to get more.*

C: Is generally the access to funding an obstacle for start-up founders in Palestine?

DZ: *Definitely it's much easier to fundraise as a start-up than as a nonprofit. If the individual is really motivated, he'll get funding. There are sources. The problem is in the seed funding. That's also highlighted by the World Bank in its report about the tech ecosystem in West Bank and Gaza. In this report there is a portion about the pipeline investment. And that's totally true. Many organizations just fund start-ups at the seed level and they expect them to become Uber. That's never gonna happen. What should happen is the follow-up funding. So, yes, it's possible to get seed funding but we have a big problem with follow-up funding. After the individual has achieved something. A lot of companies didn't get finding simply because they're not considered successful. They haven't got enough revenue or enough profit. But that's a problem we have. Start-ups here can get seed funding but they can't get to the second round funding.*

C: Do you consider that the political situation, especially the Israeli occupation, influence the entrepreneurship ecosystem?

DZ: *The occupation influences every portion of our life. So, directly and indirectly, of course it influences entrepreneurship. I think the most important one is that we don't have a direct connection with the regional tech ecosystem. Even travelling is really difficult. We are not allowed to travel from the Israeli airport, so we have to go to Jordan and going to Jordan itself has a very massive transaction cost which people say "ok I am not going to travel". That disconnects you from the ecosystem abroad and that's a big issue. Even if you're trying to expand and grow your business, you need to develop your own connection wherever you are. And that is very difficult, even us as an organization, it's one of our biggest challenges: How to make sure the start-ups connect to their market? And it's much more difficult in Gaza than in the West Bank.*

C: Regarding the education in Palestine, do you think that graduated students are well prepared to become entrepreneurs?

DZ: *No I don't think they are. Many problems emerge regarding that. I think that our universities don't challenge the students enough and not develop their critical thinking, their critical analysis skills within their degree. They graduate confused, with lack of confidence about they are able to achieve. A lot of*

them want just to settle a job, earn a salary and that's success for them. That's ok. Many people are like that. Becoming an entrepreneur is not especially an achievement. But what I am saying is that when it comes to entrepreneurship the students are not getting prepared, in Palestine. And it's not because they don't know, it's because they are not capable. The reason the individuals not only implement, but also not innovate, is because they don't challenge the students. They should give the students the mentality "I can get anything", whether it's true or not. It's better than the mentality "I should get a job as quick as possible". And that is also in the secondary education. There is an entrepreneurship train they just created and it's in pilot mode. We have multiple options in the twelve grade and so the new one is called the entrepreneurship one. It's really interesting and it's a beautiful start. I hope they continue with that. But then you have to follow up that at the university. The reason individuals are not able to only implement but also innovate, is because they don't challenge the students. The teachers should put the effort into actually getting students graduating with critical thinking at the end of the license; and give them the that mentality of "I can do anything", whether you can or not will be much better than giving the graduates the mentality of "I just want to get a job as quickly as possible". I think that component is technical, but it's also very emotional. University should provide them with more homework, more pressure, more work projects, ... I think it's just a waste of time what they're doing at University nowadays.

C: OK alright and regarding the legal environment that do you think that there are incentives to promote intrapreneurship in the legislation?

DZ: So we have been working on a new company law. To make it easier for companies to register and to have a much better corporate regulation around specific types of companies etc. I think the most important thing is to be able to register easily. They are trying that for a very long time and haven't progressed, just because there are so many interests' groups that are not interested in new company's law. They are just making enough money that they don't want to have a change. For an example, lawyers Association takes a really nice amount of money out of each company registered. They lobby the government really really badly just so they don't do that. It affects companies. I think that when it comes to registering company, it's not the hardest place in the world. If you have a good lawyer, you'll register pretty good. He will finish everything for maybe \$1200. But if you don't have a lawyer, that's going to take longer.

C: What are the strengths of the Palestinian entrepreneurship ecosystem?

DZ: Well that's a good question, let me think about it actually. ... . No honestly, it's very very difficult thing to measure. When I think about strengths, I just compare it to other entities around us, like the Jordanian ecosystem, the Lebanese ecosystem. I am just not able yet to say that there is a specific

*strength that the ecosystem has, to say it has an advantage or a comparative advantage. We haven't had anything to success stories; the infrastructure isn't as welcoming as many other countries around us; we're very closed off from the world because of the occupation; people here say we have a high literacy rate, a higher education, but these are just marketing statements, to be honest, the literacy rate is just like in any other country around us.*

C: I read that so many times that it was convinced it was true.

*DZ: Yes, people say that, including in the documents we share with the world because we want to attract investors. But I am a realistic person. First of all, I think all the literacy rate is not a good way to measure that. And we have a look at secondary education and tertiary education, they are quite high, but not different from other countries around us. When I look at the World Bank data page, when it comes to literacy rate, youth, males, age from 15 to 24, Jordan is like 99 and WB is like 99,2. So also when it comes to educational attainment, people who at least completed post-secondary education, with males of 24 years old and +, in Jordan in 2010 it's 28%, so that would have changed by now but anyway, and then in 2010 in the West Bank, it's 25%. What I'm trying to say is that we're looking for a competitive advantage over the countries or the region, I think it's a good thing to recognize first that there are not very clear strengths. Whoever works on this field should recognize that immediately and say "I'm going to do something about it". That's what we're trying to do at Mission right now. We want to create these success stories, find the individuals which are willing to go the extra mile, and start making strips, start getting these people out.*

C: What recommendations would you give to the government to improve the intrapreneurship ecosystem?

*DZ: I think they need to create some sort of a board, or some sort of a governmental entity that watches university performance, private and public, and clearly makes sure that universities are taking their role seriously and challenging students, to the utmost extent, just like many other countries. So that the board will make Universities really take their role seriously and I think we'll directly see the output of each of the universities.*

C: All right, so education is really important to lead to change.

*DZ: Absolutely, and it's not enough to just say "we'll create some policy". No, make a board that will frankly scare universities and actually do something. So that's one thing and I think it's very important because people would just rather stick with the status quo. And this kind of things can change that. The second thing I would implement is to make it almost cost 0 to create a company. Not \$1000, zero. Try*

*to make it as cheap as possible. And the 3rd one which I think is good, is allow non-for-profits to work more freely, and to get established. Because now it's really difficult.*

C: Why is that difficult?

*DZ: Well, we have a non-for-profit company system that was abused by people, and by money laundry. So they have been fixing it, but they have shut the whole thing down. So now you can't register anymore. There is a different model called the foundation model. The model basically requires you to have 10 people that come and basically say that they are on your board and give their IDs. Then it goes to the Ministry of Interior and it takes quite a lot of time for them to approve. That's what happens on a foundation model. These are the two only models for non-for-profits. If you wanna have.*

C: OK and my last question is about the international support. Do you still think that the country and its economy are mostly benefitting from that?

*DZ: So this is my opinion, I still need to validate it with data, but I am quite sure about it thanks to my experience of eleven months. The international community has an old mentality of "we're gonna go in that country and we're gonna show them what's best. Because we have people being paid 5, 6 or 7 thousand dollars a month and they know how to do that". Unfortunately, with that mentality they are giving their own priorities. They damage the Palestinian entrepreneurship ecosystem, and the Palestinian economy, more than the occupation. We have a Palestinian government that for sure knows money is blowing in no matter what happens. Why would they invest in a private sector? There is no incentive because they know money will come, so they are just thinking "OK so I'll just stay in my office, do my things, maintain the status quo". But imagine that money didn't exist, then they will think "damn, I really need to do something about this, make the businesses thrive, and then tax them, so when they're taxed, I'll be able to make some good money and maintain my office". My argument is that because that money flowing in, many people are not taking their job seriously, the government does not incentivize developing the private sector as much as it would have been if that money didn't flow in. So what I think the international should do, is to 1) not set priorities and let the organizations feel their own priorities, really see what the people need and want and when they know what difference they want to do, then the international community can bring their consultants and supporters and all these people that come from abroad. Secondly, the international community must stop giving money to the PA! Try to give as much as possible to organizations that are working underground, that have a sustainability model ensuring that they actually are able to generate some money after the funds are gone, rather than pouring money for politics. So, look at the USA, if that project coordinator doesn't distribute the money as quickly as possible, politically it's a problem. So, I think that the international*

*support should reduce at the moment, only focus on capacity building with that money. If they give money, they must give it to organizations.*

Sidekick – Tareq Nowarah

Claire Coppée: C

Tareq Nowarah: TN

C: OK so, first, as an introduction, let's talk about your background. What inspired you to work in the field of business and economic development?

*TN: To be honest there wasn't really inspiration. I worked in the high tech industry in Israel for almost four years and a half and some time in marketing and I.T. departments at the same companies you use to work about. I did manage some teams within coworking spaces. We worked at Regus in Israel. So, I spent some time there I had the idea in the back of my head and then I came here. We had an empty space that you could rent for a good price. So, all the money that I worked within the past four years I put it in this project and I set it up some things. So, we were hoping it would be bigger as soon as the market grows.*

C: All right. And can you briefly explain why Sidekick's mission and functioning is?

*TN: Basically the mission is simple I just managed to provide a premium and high-quality space for people who need it. As you know the Palestinian entrepreneurship ecosystem if you call it like that is relatively new. When I look at the business funds and the incentives that we had were two years ago, it was a lot more riskier than it is now to open such a project. Let's say, five years ago, if we had opened Sidekick at this moment, it would have been very difficult to acquire new customers, to convince people that this an option that they can use. It's not something people are used to. Everybody just works in the traditional offices or freelancers use to work home. So this wasn't an option in the back of their head or they had no idea that this is an option they can use. So I think we should be trying to fix this problem and I think it is a space that people can depend on.*

C: All right. And so if I understand well, there is no support and follow-up of the people working in the space?

*TN: No, we're not going to incubate projects or invest in any of these,. It is only business service that we provide.*

C: I get it. What do you anticipate the impact of this project to have on the region and its population, and, more broadly, what can be the impact of entrepreneurship on Palestine?

TN: *Let's say, 5 or 10 years ago, there was a good number of start-ups and there was only internet service providers. The only high-tech company that was considering an industry in Palestine was Intel, we can include them in the high-tech industry. Right now, I cannot get specific numbers about it, but there's an expansion of this industry. Many businesses are getting inside this... - I want to call it a bubble but it is a bubble if you ask me - ... industry more people are working in it. As the majors at the universities evolved and people are more choosing to do it with I.T. and information technology. So it's growing but not as you would expect from a market that has this kind of potential. With the expertise available there is the potential of doing some good projects but there still are lots of difficulties that stop people from expanding. If somebody has a good business model, it's a little bit harder – I don't want to say it is a lot harder – to make it go forward than if you were in London or in Tel Aviv.*

C: Yes of course. You talked about a bubble. I also read about a kind of bubble in Palestine in the entrepreneurial field. What exactly did you think about when you mentioned that bubble?

TN: *The bubble is that at any moment the Israelis can come into Ramallah, into any city, and put in a curfew. Everybody has to stay home, nobody can go to work. Businesses will lose clients, they will lose any kind of deals they had with the outside, the UK for example, if it is a service provider.*

*So it's a little bit hard because you are living under pressure of a military rule. A military rule is an overstatement they can declare, they can declare a curfew or even a closed military area, which means that not even reporters or media can get inside. And it's very easy for them to do that you know. So this is this is what I mean by a bubble, everything can stop at any second and nobody can do anything about it.*

C: All right. And is there a specific profile of the people that can get access to your place? Are there some criteria?

TN: *I can't say that, but we can talk about the segments. I think we tend to make mostly start-ups. Mostly 60 percent of start-ups, freelancers maybe 50 percent, non-profit organizations that have short term projects in Palestine maybe 5 or 4 percent, people who are just seeking a new market location 5 percent and the rest 6 or 5 percent Regarding the industry, I.T. and financial services are almost 70 percent of the market, of the industry. People who work in retail in region are like 7 percent, manufacturing 4 percent, distribution 6 percent, and the rest is like 9 percent.*

C: OK. Thank you. How many people do you host?

TN: *Our memberships are monthly. And it goes from 18 to 22. It changes every month every month. According to our capacity this is almost 65 to 70 per cent which is what we consider as a full capacity.*

*So that's not much, this space we have is pretty small. Almost 200 feet. But we will rapidly get as a scaled-up model so we can use another space to expand and improve.*

C: To buy the place and to arrange it, did you just use your personal funds, or did you use some international support or bank loans?

TN: *Just a small loan we had to take. We were desperate. But mostly it was the ad was which the business we take every nickel and dime in total profits to get it through all right.*

C: And do you think that's more generally the access to funding is an obstacle for the start-up founders?

TN: *At some point it is yes. I can't tell you any good information because I haven't worked with any start-ups that require funding but we have a start-up here called Yas (I can give you its information). He's setting up a crowdfunding push for Palestine. He works with lots of banks and some of them are incubated and gather funding for such projects. So, it might be interesting for you.*

C: Yes, it would! Thank you. And you and about the political situation do you consider that it's that the Israeli occupation influences the Palestinian entrepreneurship ecosystem?

TN: *Of course, it does. It's obvious even though not anyone can see it. If you're from outside, you cannot see it, you cannot see the stigmata of the occupation because simply people that live outside don't a frame of reference to refer to what happens here. But yes of course it influences everything. So for example because of the military rule the P.A President Mahmoud Abbas can't leave the city until he gets a permission from a colonel who works in a military basement in a settlement, 3 or 4 kilometers away from the president's house. So, he's the guy that can decide if our president can leave the city or not. That reflects if you scale it down what happens to the normal people, to the individuals and then in terms of freedom of movement for goods, people, services... But not information, you can spread information online. But these are the difficulties if you want to consider the market, that the Palestinian start-ups, especially the start-ups who depend on goods and services or start-ups that have to move around. Also, I cannot use the services of a consultant from another country, well I cannot invite him here if he doesn't have close ties with Israel. I have another example: last month the Israeli militaries created a special room on the checkpoints. Have you ever been to Palestine by the way?*

C: Yes I've been there last year.

TN: *OK. So when you go from one city to another there's a checkpoint, a barrier. In some of those checkpoints the Israeli are building conference rooms and special small business centers for Israeli and Palestinian businessmen to meet. So they don't even let the businessmen who want to do business with the Israeli companies go inside Israel and reach the companies and do business with them. They have*

*to ask their Israeli counterparts to come to the conference room at the checkpoint and then they have to discuss under the supervision of the militaries. And also I don't want to distress that but it's like people in Auschwitz trying to do business with the Germans or with the German army. They added those special rooms where the Jews used to fix clothes and shoes and different kinds of services and all the Germans could just get inside and get whatever they like. It's not exactly like that. But you know it's the same concept. Both sides have to go in this room and have to do business.*

C: OK. All right. And regarding the more specific sector of the digital start-ups is the access to Internet now good?

TN: *Yes now we've got the 3G youhouu! But the telecommunication companies, the guys who have the licenses, want to upgrade their equipment. They can't do that because they need a permission from the Israeli military. And the military say "if you want to get this equipment, you have to come up with something", which is not true, they cannot deny them. The upgrade is going to be difficult. The Israeli can dismantle the towers because most of them are on the touchpoints.*

C: What are the strengths of the entrepreneurship ecosystem?

TN: *Mostly the people working. If I want to look at a specific industry and look at the technical skills that the Palestinians have, I see expertise and that's the best we have. So also, the payment wages are relatively low, lower than neighboring countries except for Egypt. Plus, lots of people studying I.T., lots of people studying programming and everybody is investing their time.*

C: All right. And do you think that the educational system is good?

TN: *People as soon as they graduate from school, if somebody by chance shows them a possibility or an opportunity to pursue programming or robotics building, they will pursue it after school. But the budget the PA deploys for education, especially public schools, is much lower than the budgets for everything else. The curricula are outdated, the schools are not well prepared and not well equipped. The education system is very hard, even for teaching English.*

C: What do you think about the government's role in the support of entrepreneurship? And what recommendations would you give to the government to improve the entrepreneurial ecosystem?

TN: *They're not doing a good job in terms of regulations, in terms of corruption, in terms of how they support the start-up ecosystem. For example, the Ministry of Economics. For example, I want to register my company, let's say, in Belgium, we can do everything online, I guess. Maybe you have to go somewhere to sign up papers or you can do that by mail. In Palestine you have to put the stamp of the administration and you have to spend at least half a day there going from one office to another because*

*they want to hire as more people as possible to help unemployment, but so, instead of going to only one person, you have to go to 10 people. Finally, the question of why you can do the same thing all over online. It's not user friendliness for the people who work in the sector. And it's not motivating for people who want to put up a business in Palestine. The Palestinian government is not the best government to work with. Now about corruption it's also bad.*

C: Okay. And do you think that in the short or long term the entrepreneurship ecosystem could improve the population's and country's situation?

TN: *Yes of course. I mean there are a lot of untapped advantages that the Palestinians can use. For example, people in the ecosystem speak very good English, moreover people working in the construction industry are really competent. Palestine moreover has a good geographical situation. We can speak English in Arabic so it's a good opportunity for the big companies here. Moreover, we are close to Israel that has one of the best industries in the world. We could learn a lot. We could operate. But you know this setting has to be different. The people who work in Israel they have no idea what's going on here. Some of them think that Palestine is a totally different country with an army and planes and F16s and everything. They think there is a different currency. They have an idea, they think some people get shot when they come in the West Bank and Gaza. They're far away from reality because they don't have to deal with these things, they have ones of the best living standards in the region and make a lot of money so yes they don't have to care about that. But of course, from the Palestinian perspective, it's fucked up.*

C: Of course. And do you think that the international support is positive?

TN: *No, it's not a good thing. First of all because all these non-profit organizations or the donor countries which donate to the Palestinian Authority or to other organizations in Palestine have expectancies. For example, if they donate one million dollars for a project, the project has to be done according to their request. They specify that those million dollars have to walk back to an American company who does this project for you, so you only get the outcome of the project. But the Palestinians don't get the salaries, don't get the jobs. It's like a scheme, like they are giving you lots of money and taking it back at the same time. For example, they will build a route here, but the company in charge will be American, and the workers will be American. We'll take a small bite of the donation and that's it. Everything goes back to the USA, to the American companies were damaged and government taxes. One more thing, the donations that are given specifically to the Palestinian entrepreneurship ecosystem are not evenly distributed, there is a lot of corruption in the P.A. There is also another type of corruption: People who have an idea for a project and other people offer them to invest in their project: "we'll give you money for the equity, for more equity than what you were offering me". So, the entrepreneurs*

*finally don't accept these funds, but they have already start-up their project. They don't have money, they don't have income. People cannot make it within one year or two years. They are doomed and they have lost their time. They are depressed. So these international investors are helping other people but for profit.*

C: Do you think that the Palestinian diaspora has a role to play in the support of this ecosystem?

TN: *Not until now. There are some attempts as far as I know the entrepreneurs with the Palestinian community. But I have no idea if it's successful or not. As far as I know but it's not as good as it could be and it could be something beautiful. They could pump lots of money into Palestinian start-ups here. But you know, it's still a risk for them as it is a risk for everybody else.*

C: OK. That was my last question. I don't know if you would like to add something.

TN: *I don't think so. Well I want to apologize for my bad English. You can also look at the Paris Trade Agreement during the Oslo Accords in 1984. Plus, you can write about the payment gateways, Paypal for example.*

Souktel – Maggie McDonough & Luna Aroury

Claire Coppée: C

Maggie McDonough: MM

Luna Aroury: LA

MM: *I would like to introduce you to Luna Amrouy who is based in our Ramallah office.*

LA: *Good afternoon Claire, nice to meet you.*

C: Hi, nice to meet you. So, if you agree, I'll begin by asking you me list of questions, feel free to add whatever you think. So, let's talk first about your background: what were you doing before Souktel?

MM: *I am a senior technical manager in Souktel, I work for this company for about 6 and a half years. We are a company that focuses on technology for aid and development. I am not a technology person, but I am an international development person. I was originally hired by the first and at that time only person that was based in DC. This person was really looking for someone to increase business within the US Aid, the US government more broadly contracting sector. So I was hired to do that.*

LA: *I work for Souktel for about 4 years, leading a portfolio project for the Middle East and North Africa. Before that most of my work experience was working with development management or home care*

*system here in Palestine. I did some mentorship with start-ups here in Palestine, bringing some tech ideas and stuff. And I also worked in the development sector for the last 5 years or so.*

C: What inspired you both to work for Souktel?

*MM: Well, a couple of things for me. So before working for Souktel, I spent most of my career at either very large donor organizations or midsize implementing organizations. And I was first really interested to try a start-up. Coming from these bigger organizations that were sort of fairly entrenched in their systems and bureaucracies. I thought it would be interesting to try a start-up. I also knew that I wanted to do something that focus on the Middle East and North Africa region during the latter part of my career. At my former organization I started working extensively in that area and I wanted to stick with it. Back from when I was working for the other organization, I heard about Souktel's reputation, I believed in their mission and I think it's the combination of those 3 things that initially attracted me to it.*

*LA: For me I think it was me taking the risk, changing my career path and going to technology. I explored what does technology mean and what does it look like. For me it's not just focused on Palestine or nearby countries, but rather it's a global tech company. When I arrived into Souktel it was more stable than when Maggie arrived. It's technology, it's development, it's humanitarian and global. So the good combination and the good package inspired me with the actual change of my carrier.*

C: Can you briefly explain what Souktel's mission and functioning is?

*MM: Sure so we basically do technology for any development. It can take a lot of different forms. Typically we are brought in at the beginning of a long-term development program, so by long term I mean 4, 5, 6 years. We work with our implementing partners to create a digital strategy. In other words to sort of understand what type of development challenges are being expected during the course of our program and then providing strategic advising on the best applications of technology to address their challenges. We have an in-house software team so usually we will follow up the strategy with the development of digital solutions. Then we will typically deploy an offer post launch support to a lot of our programs. We work across a fairly broad range of sectors: we've supported education, health, democracy, governance, humanitarian aid, delivery monitoring and evaluation, agriculture among others. It's basically developing tools to strengthen programming in those sectors.*

C: How many people are now working in Souktel?

*MM: So we've got about 20 full time people, and then with our sort of consulting roster and part time people we have about 35 or so.*

C: Are they based all over the world or mainly in Palestine?

MM: *Mainly in Palestine. We've got a small team in DC that primarily does a lot of liaising with the US government, donors and clients. But all of our project management capacity sits here, all of our software development capacity sits here, and most of our support function, like HR, finance and things like that, sit here.*

C: What did it take to turn the idea into a business? What were the key challenges along the way?

MM: *Well I can give you a second-hand information because I joined the company you know a couple years after its inception. The biggest challenge that I would identify is that the business model that we're working on and the sector we are working in is a very difficult one. So, we've taken on a couple series of venture capital funding and even though our investors have some sort of social impact criteria: they do look for a double bottom line but in the same time they're looking for exponential returns on their investment. We don't really work in a sector that lends itself to exponential increases and so, to me, one of the bigger problems is around our business model and the sector that we work in. The way that you sell yourselves and advertise, build up your brand is still very person to person focus, very personal relationship focus. Having a company based in Palestine while the heart of your clientele is abroad was a challenge. We had to hire a team in DC to handle that piece of the business.*

C: Did Souktel use the services of an incubator accelerator or any type of support organization?

MM: *No.*

C: Do you think it's not useful?

MM: *I think it's very useful, it's just not the path that we took. Luna and I were last week in Amman looking at different ways to support digitization in certain sectors, especially the ICT sector. There are some great models, even though it's not a boilerplate for Palestine, but I would say that in some ways the issues are similar: there's a small market, there are no huge amounts of capital going into the places etc. I think some of the most successful interventions that we saw there were around some of the innovation labs and accelerator programs there. It's not just in Jordan, we've seen miles of that elsewhere and I am a big believer in that model.*

LA: *I totally agree with you on this. It's an opportunity. We at Souktel at a very early stage it was a different approach that we took.*

C: Thank you. So you mentioned Souktel was financed by venture capitalists. Do you think that more generally the access to funding is an issue in Palestine?

MM: *Yes absolutely. At the macro level it's one of the biggest issues. If you benchmark foreign direct investments in Palestine with neighboring countries, we are obviously lagging behind. There are a lot of regulatory logistical reasons for that. But there are definitely access to capital issues. Not only foreign investment, in terms of local investment, there are also comparatively sort of pulls behind. A lot of the sources of capital that you see in neighboring countries are much more limited in the case of Palestine.*

C: *Alright. I've read a lot of contradictory things about the funds in Palestine. On one hand some people are that there is not enough funding, on the other hand some are saying that there is too much donor support which is was creating a bubble in Palestine: too much capital in comparison with the entrepreneurship. So, what do you think about it?*

M: *I would reframe the problem slightly differently. It's not a lack of entrepreneurship to absorb the capital, it's that the priorities of donor funded programs do not necessarily reflect local sustainable businesses. We also heard it in Jordan: the donor and governmental interventions end up skewing the market. When they encourage businesses to set up around certain concepts or a certain sector or whatever, when the business sets up they find that that market doesn't organically exist. I think that's the bigger problem, but I would like to hear Luna's opinion on that.*

LA: *I didn't get that last wave, but I also have been seeing that the last few years here in Palestine. Donors would come in with certain objectives where they want to meet. So, people are fighting to have a job or opening their businesses, so they just take the money from the donors, and agree to their terms. Second, it's not a free market anyway. There are so many positions on what kind of industries or sectors. Moreover, we can't go freely in and out the country, so about exports and imports there are a lot of constraints set by the occupation. The economic agreement is affecting the Palestinian market and limiting the utilization of the available resources. We see more entrepreneurs, more start-ups, so donor support is boosting the attraction to this. It is useful. But my personal opinion is: are we coming up with very innovative ideas or just things that are going to take us to the next level abroad or local? Maybe people are using entrepreneurship to get out of the country and set up with something that's going to be localized out of the country.*

C: *What comes next for Souktel?*

MM: *A couple of things. The vision of our CEO is to have the highest exit in terms of value in Palestine. We have a long way to go to get that, but there's a couple of things we're doing. We are broadening our reach in the humanitarian and aid sector, so we have new clients, new funders, new owners, new countries, new technical sectors etc. We are building on our brand and the skills that we've been doing since the company started. The second thing that we're looking at is introducing commercial lines of business, so that would be sort of like what we're doing now, but for more private sector companies. In*

*other words, instead of building out platforms for donor missions, maybe doing it for a hospital or ministry. So, just expanding the range of people buying what we do. The third thing that we're looking at, and we are still on the R&D phase on that, we're looking at productizing some of the things that we've built over the years. We're seeing where the demand lies for the software that we built in the past and figuring out what are there stats models around it.*

C: Ok thank you. What is it that makes you get out of bed every morning? How is Souktel and your job making Palestine or the world in general a better place?

*MM: I think the number one thing that gets me out of bed in the morning is my colleague. We got a pretty close-knit team in spite of being sort of geographically distributed. Personally, it's really important to work with them. And also, I love Palestine. I want to do what I can to contribute to it. Even though we don't have any direct development projects here now, the growth of the company we'd like to reach is contributing to the local economy. And then the mission of the company is something that I enjoy. I believe to my core in the ability of technology to transform the ways to deliver humanitarian responses.*

*LA: I truly enjoy this healthy environment that we have. The other thing is the enjoyment of supporting partners about causes that are happening. I am not talking especially about Palestine, but we are talking about bringing technology to other regions in the world, especially the Middle East and Africa for the field service.*

C: About the specificities of the Palestinian entrepreneurial ecosystem, to what extent did the Israeli occupation impose constraints on the creation and everyday business of the company?

*MM: I'll just talk about the logistic point of view because I have an eye on it as a manager, but Luna is the one that can really answer this question. On the logistic point, the travel is hard, not only globally, but even between colleagues. If one lives in Jerusalem for example, he will have 2 or 3 hours of transit every day. We also do have a global travel issue, that means some of our staff can't spend time on the field when our clients request it. We are under a fair amount of restrictions in terms of our mission as a company. It's not it's not a free market situation where we could just decide as a company to do something and do it. There are a lot of legal hurdles to change anything in terms of our service offering. Things like banking are very difficult especially since we are a distributed team and we are getting funds from the US. The barriers are sort of ridiculous. At a higher-level attracting investment is more difficult here, it's harder to make a pitch for a Palestinian company then it would be for a company in North Africa or Jordan. There are perceptions of operating in an unpredictable and volatile environment with logistical issues around it. So things like that from the logistical point of view are difficult.*

LA: *You're talking about occupation, and the occupation power is actually considered one of the top ICT countries in the whole world in security and cybersecurity and so many other things. So, we are not even close to compete, whether the technical capacity of the workers, their exposure, the funding provided to them, the mentorship provided to Palestinians compared to the other side. What's happening on a higher level some Palestinian start-ups or entrepreneurs are being reinvested and asked for outsourcing coming from the other side that has its own ideas which are destructive for us. That's a huge challenge that we need to solve.*

C: Concerning the political situation, what do you think about the role of the Palestinian government in the support of entrepreneurship?

MM: *Well it's not just the Palestinian government. It's probably the case of the governments in the region here in particular. Think about who is leading the governments and are they ready for what technology means? Are they ready for the term entrepreneurship in general? So, it's not the government as a whole but it's those in control and how they support this. There is a lot of potential in the market, we are already believers of ourselves and of our capacities. But we do not get the amount of support needed from the government. Hopefully in the very near future though. Now that they have actually the new government, we are hoping to see changes coming from their side. From my point of view, in the bigger picture, to really jumpstart the entrepreneurship ecosystem requires a major capital investment. As you noted the ecosystem in West Bank has been largely driven by the donor sector, which is partially disappearing now (especially with the cut out of USA). There are a lot of things that the government is doing well. Recognizing it is important. There are some fascinating initiatives like in universities. Universities for example introduced entrepreneurship curricula in the past year too. They're doing a lot of things right, but to do it at a systemic level requires a capital I don't think the government has at this point. Look for example at Jordan, there is a strategy there to sort of jumpstart the ICT sector and it's going to be like a 100 million dollars investment or something. Palestine doesn't have the budget capacity. They don't have a lot of different donor support anymore either.*

LA: *Well there is a different vision about that depending if you see it from the outside or from the inside. Keep in mind that you are talking about the government that barely pays salaries to their employees because they don't have enough fund, plus because the occupation takes most of the taxes that must belong to the Palestinians. So, for them to invest in other things while there is a very basic need (paying for public employees) is a challenge. You need to study the different perspectives of what challenges does this government have and how they can tackle those to move forward.*

C: Alright. What recommendations would you give to the government to improve the situation?

MM: I think the government doesn't have the key. One of the real keys is mobilizing investment and I think that as long as the political situation remains as it is (the logistic logistical nightmares created by that occupation), it's going to be hard to mobilize investment and capital to flow into the country. I think there are things that the government can do at a smaller scale. Like around these sorts of innovation funds, incubator and accelerator models, supporting entrepreneurship initiatives in the universities, things like the Palestinian investment fund. But these are addressing one or two parts of the value chain, not the whole thing.

C: Where does the change must come from?

MM: *The US. Well no, first there must be sort of a political resolution on the state of Palestine that would change its attractiveness as a foreign investment climate. Until the government of Palestine can operate with full independence to make decisions economically. Even things just like controlling his own airspace, controlling his own shipping way. It's all going to be piecemeal until there's a resolution.*

LA: *About the question of what recommendations, I could have for my government, the question would be what is actually in their control. What is in their control that they can do to come up with an open society. We do have lack of information on this, we call it the Palestinian government but is it really a government that controls its people, land, and resources? It's too complicated to ask me which recommendations I would give, I am not even in the position to answer that.*

C: I understand. Regarding the education, do you think that the Palestinians are ready to become entrepreneurs after graduation?

MM: *Absolutely. I don't consider myself as an entrepreneur, but I've worked with a lot of entrepreneurs. Most of my colleagues, which are tech people, have graduated from Palestinian universities. They're intelligent, they're smart, they have lots of ideas. They're just taking some experience, and in some years most them will create their own start-up. That's just an example. We already have a couple of workers who have left us to start their own businesses, and I think that the motivation to become entrepreneur is higher than in a lot of other places in the region that I've seen. I can't speak as a Palestinian, I am speaking as an outsider, but from conversations I've had with friends, colleagues, the families of employees or whatever, in some ways there is an equation of entrepreneurship with resistance against the system.*

C: Great. And do you think the entrepreneurship could improve the population's or country's situation?

MM: *Yes absolutely. Because of some of the challenges around the occupation, I think boosting the economy in some ways is the major way.*

LA: *The way I see entrepreneurship is that, when you have your idea, you believe sky is the limit, or you don't even have any limit. You won't see the occupation as a limitation, but it does boost your way of thinking, regardless all the challenges and the limitations that we have here in Palestine.. Even though the occupation is a very major thing. I always admire and speak out of what Gaza has been through, about how they were able to take this to the next level. They are a small area, they don't even can walk around, they don't even have electricity. And they manage to come up with ideas of how they can freelance and come up with ideas to support projects abroad. So, this can happen, and this can work out.*

The Green Shop – Wijdan Al-Sharif

Claire Coppée: C

Wijdan Al-Sharif: WAS

C: What were you doing before The Greenshop? What is your background?

WAS: *I was working for an environmental NGO and I wanted to do something for women because women are highly exposed to toxic using whether they order cosmetics or cleaning material. I just wanted to do some kind of marketing services for the organic products and at this stage there was once company was doing some cleaning material that is using hydrogen peroxide. I did some marketing for them for a while. Then I was searching the market but there is no much organic products other than food, I'm not interested marketing food because there is a big market already for the food. I might be doing some kind of awareness about how to remove toxins. I was trying to find some alternatives on the Palestinian market. What made me pose my act for a while is that there are no enough green products in the Palestinian market, so my concept was not to buy the product and then sell it to the end user, but to be contracted by the big companies and to do the marketing for them through just social media websites. I won't do any marketing for any company just to make money. I have to confirm that this product is really good and to test it myself and then to do the marketing. So the issue is that the Palestinian market does not have enough green products.*

*I was told that there is a company that's doing some really good products, but they are really expensive. It's an American company that is doing cosmetics for women what was impressive that they have a research and development unit that is headed by doctors which makes it a more trustworthy company. Every product has a technical background, and I myself was convinced: I use the product and it was good. And I thought "ok I can start marketing this product" but the products are very expensive and the economic situation is very tough at this time. So I will maybe continue this online shop in a few months or next year.*

C: Today your project is not really active?

*WAS: It's not really active because I am freelancer, so I had to many other activities. The whole situation is not working well, and lately I got a managing project, hence I don't have enough time to give. Plus, in there are challenges in the market and the whole economical situation is not healthy. In addition to the financial crisis, the incubators in Palestine are not willing to support any new start-up, they would look at the benefit that would come from this start-up, so they would be supporting more like application development start-ups which can be sold for millions, while the green initiatives don't seem to be profitable from a very close perspective. I can make less money for a longer period of time, but they would be willing to support a project that can be sold within a year for millions.*

*There are incubators but they are not willing to support green initiatives. The green is not very lucky with incubators in Palestine. I do understand how incubators work and the fact that I can't use them won't stop my idea, it will just make me move slowly.*

C: Alright. How did you did you start The Green Shop? Did you use your personal funds?

*WAS: Actually, there was a start-up program called CUS and I had this idea in mind but I never had time to work on developing my concept. The nice thing with CUS is that they are more interested in supporting green initiatives and mainly initiatives who work with the water, and waste water and sanitation. Committing to their training course gave me the chance to develop my concept. I developed the logo, I started slowly. I found a coach. Sometimes you do have the idea but you don't put enough effort on developing it and then to deliver what becomes the start-up. And by the way I have officially registered my concept with the Chamber of Commerce in Ramallah. Still it's not registered with the ministry of economy because you know at this stage it's too early. I'm not making enough money and no one is asking me to give any receipts or something.*

C: Do you think that the Israeli occupation impose constraints on The Green Shop's creation and everyday business?

*WAS: For my concept no. My concept is an online shop, so what I will be doing is not to buy the products and sell them because sometimes the product will be for like 10 shekels (2,50€) and it isn't worth to pay shipping to sell it to people. What I'll be doing if the products are available in the market it's extracting the marketing costs for the company. I will talk to the company that this product is green I can do marketing for it for like \$500.00 a month. So I'll make a contract with this company and they would pay me return of the marketing. They will see the reflection of the marketing on their sales, this should be guaranteed within the first three months. So the occupation is not affecting that. But if I wanted to buy the products online and order them, I would pay extra for the shipping. Because paying extra is worth*

*it for expensive quality products; but for cheaper products it is not worth it. At this stage, yes, I might have to pay customs for the Israeli customs and I'm not willing to pay customs for Israel. Because I'm buying some stuffs for Palestine. This is an issue. This doesn't apply to every shipment, but they would catch a shipment out of 10 or out of 15 and then they would ask you to pay not only the shipment but sometimes for the time they keep it. On the other hand, I was trying to contact the company in Germany who is also selling green cosmetics or organic cosmetics and they wanted me to be connected to the Israeli dealer. This is another thing because prices will be much more expensive because then you have to pay extra for the Israeli dealer. The prices initially are much more expensive in Israel and then I would have to buy them from the dealers, and because I don't buy a lot of products, I will not be eligible for a good discount. Hence, I wasn't willing to do so. Besides in many cases you will find that the Israeli dealers do the contract with the company and they also signed the contract on behalf of Palestine, they do the contract for both. But in general, they don't pass the product to Palestine. They don't send the product to Palestine. I would then have to pay an extra amount for shipping and shipping is very very expensive. I think it doesn't work to market products that have a dealer in Israel. This is one the issues and it is highly reflected on the cost; it makes you think double before considering any product. This is the main issue for me because I don't really export or import any product. The effect is mainly reflected on the high cost on the cosmetics, it's already a big effect, but less important than in my original idea where I was considering buying these products and to import them.*

C: What do you think about the role of the Palestinian government in the support of entrepreneurship?

*WAS: Their role is not enough. In 2018 I was working on a white paper about the green entrepreneurship in Palestine. It was part of the Switchmed. We did a research about the green ecosystem and what would be the challenges of the opportunities available. Mainly the challenges were about the awareness in the Palestinian community, and the occupation from different perspectives, and access to finance, access to technical support. All the challenges were mentioned in one research. I think it's the only research that was done on the green entrepreneurship. The governmental system is trying to help but currently it's not really supportive. I went to Lebanon for CES to evaluate projects in green entrepreneurship and in Lebanon the issue is that they don't have any kind of incubators. In Palestine, we do have that. At the same time, in Lebanon, the registrations fees are extremely high and in Palestine it's not. Besides the system here would understand that you are a start-up and that you don't need to register a company. Moreover, we do have this organization that is called PIPA, for encouraging I it this year I'll check that in English Skype well we do have an organization Topeka pick Palestine Investment Promotion Agency. They do have some kind of control about what to support and what not. They were able to work on some kind of incentives for the renewable energy or mainly the solar system companies. So, if a company is established to do some kind of solar system, the company*

would be eligible for some incentives. But they're not really aware of the whole green system. They should offer also incentives for waste-water companies, for solid waste companies, and for the whole system.

C: Regarding the education system, do you think that the young Palestinians are ready to become entrepreneurs after graduation?

WAS: *Definitely not. I think they should be some type of practical the curriculum that would integrate them more into the ecosystem. I graduated from one of the best universities in Palestine which is Birzeit and I really learned what to do only from the experience after graduation. The system gave me only the certificate to work. That's why I decided to do my MBA because I thought I really need some management skills. I graduated a long time ago, I'm not sure if they are considering the issue now. But for example in Birzeit there is a program for green entrepreneurship. But they are not granted any credit to do that. They are just participating if they have a green idea to be developed. And in Birzeit Continuing Education Center they have a system for green entrepreneurs but as I told you it is very optional.*

C: OK. And do you think that the entrepreneurship can improve the population's and country's situation in Palestine?

WAS: *Well, it helps in general. If from every hundred, we would have one entrepreneur that would be amazing. Because they can start their own jobs they are responsible for. It should contribute to the whole community because there will be new jobs, there will be responsible people. Our Palestinian economy is mainly based on the small businesses. If you go through the local economy, you will see that 80 to 90 percent of the businesses are small and medium in Palestine.*

C: On a general scale, how would you rate the performance of the entrepreneurial ecosystem in Palestine?

WAS: *I think other people might give you more input than me on this topic but I don't think that we have a full ecosystem. I think we need to develop an ecosystem for entrepreneurship in general. I don't think it's well established, it's only about initiatives here and there, like PIPA or the Ministry of Finance. But it's not a full system where the elements support each other. It's not enough at all. But they're still trying, a lot of the actors are open minded and are open for changes because the whole thing is very new. We can still do some kind of development, it's not mature yet, it needs more work but people like PIPA help. It's still hard to deal with the ministries because they give you information but they are still the ones that decide for everything.*

C: Regarding the ministers, yesterday a Palestinian entrepreneur told me that when you wanted to open a start-up in a certain field you had to have the agreement of the minister in charge of this sector, and that you also had to let him take parts in your organization. He told me that the ministers were consequently not making a really great job regarding entrepreneurship.

*WAS: I don't think that this information is right. Maybe it's the case if you want to register an NGO because there was an issue with the money clearance. So if you want to open a NGO you might be suspected to support terrorism, and they have to examine your project and it can take months. But the minister has nothing to do with this. Here if you want to register your company you can do that in one day, it's very easy to register a company. It's the first time I hear that you need the approval of the minister to register, it doesn't make sense.*

C: Alright, thank you. Here is my last question: do you think that the diaspora has a role to play in the support of the entrepreneurship ecosystem?

*WAS: Well I think they can if they want to. There is a welfare organization or foundation called Taawon, and it is mainly formed by Palestinian business people who were kicked out and that wanted to give back to Palestine. They can support many kinds of organizations. I think they're doing amazing work with the Palestinians in Palestine with the refugees in Lebanon and they were also supporting Palestinian minorities in Israel. Palestinian that are businesspeople abroad are willing to give back.*

C: Alright, thank you very much!

