

## SUPPORTING EAST JERUSALEM ENTREPRENEURS

Courtesy of  
Jerusalem  
Entrepreneurs  
Society and  
Technology



**J**erusalem has great historical and spiritual value, yet it has been struggling with extremely complicated political and economic challenges for over six decades. Its separation from Palestinian cities, the discrimination practiced by the Israeli occupation regime against

Palestinians in Jerusalem, and the scarce opportunities for employment or entrepreneurship are among Jerusalemites' major challenges.

Despite these challenges, however, East Jerusalem has the potential to be a fertile ground for healthy entrepreneurial activity. The pull created by an urgent need for new job opportunities, relatively easy access to global markets compared to the occupied territories, and talented young men and women who constitute valuable human resources are among the indicators that this overlooked area can foster an entrepreneurial community and replicate the success achieved by its neighbors. These factors served as an inspiration for Hani Alami, a Jerusalemite businessman, to found Jerusalem Entrepreneurs Society and Technology (JEST). JEST was launched as an NGO in 2014 with the goal to plant a seed from which an entrepreneurial community could grow.

The concept of JEST creation revolves around a physical hub for existing and aspiring entrepreneurs – from those engaged in the idea stage to those who own companies. Hub services include technological, financial, and marketing consulting and support; strategic planning advice; networking meet-ups; and platforms for joint ventures, all geared to help create a rich and effective entrepreneurial/start-up ecosystem in East Jerusalem.

Located in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood of East Jerusalem, an easily accessible, centralized location, JEST has offered services to almost 800 young Palestinian men

and women annually since 2014. A good number of them are expanding and developing start-ups, whereas others are still in the establishment phase. Currently, JEST is working on diversifying services in order to adapt to clients' needs and to support them in creating and developing viable enterprises.

JEST is particularly dedicated to reaching more women entrepreneurs in Jerusalem. In 2019, the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) declared that in Jerusalem, the rate of women's participation in the workforce is alarmingly low (9.7 percent), which means that the remaining women are either housewives or involved in informal labor, estimated to be 40 percent of Palestine's workforce (see PCBS statistics for 2018).

In 2019, the Jerusalem Institute for Policy Research published statistics stating that 341,500 Palestinians live in Jerusalem, compared to 559,800 Israelis; and poverty among Palestinians reached 78 percent, compared to 25 percent among Israelis.

JEST Monthly Meet-Up on E-Commerce.





Minds Hacks Hackathon participants.

One may argue that women's entrepreneurship requires more efforts in order to succeed and flourish. After all, Jerusalem's critical and unique situation offers very few opportunities to support women, which is why JEST is engaged in diversifying its services to serve both female and male entrepreneurs.

In addition to offering a shared workspace, JEST provides entrepreneurs with networking opportunities, technical assistance, and capacity building. For example, it continues to hold Jerusalem Tech Nights where multinational organizations provide fireside chats and tailored up-to-date training sessions to help aspiring entrepreneurs grow their networks and be exposed to realistic experience, expertise, and knowledge.

Throughout the years, JEST has hosted promising start-ups, watched them succeed, and provided technical support and networking opportunities, but the hard work that these entrepreneurs invested and the time they allocated to take their start-ups to the next level was astonishing. SynergyMED is one

of them. Founded by our own Dr. Anan Copt, who now sits on JEST's board of directors, SynergyMED is working on a nonsurgical device to treat and remove cancer tumors. The methodology was tested on mice where cancer diminished within only three days. SynergyMED continues to work on the development of its device and is currently seeking investments and strategic partnerships.

DAAD Center (د.ا.ا.م), established in 2014, focuses on the Arabic language and operates in three regional locations. The center in Jordan develops curricula to support children from 6 to 12 years old who have learning and speech disabilities; the center in Palestine offers individual and group sessions that have served 700 children since establishment in 2014; and Arabic-language summer camps take place in Turkey. Ameer Abu Laban, founder of the center, intends to work with his team on developing and launching a new IT arm that aims to design and launch applications that tackle stuttering and learning disabilities by providing speech therapy.

JEST also houses the Global Shapers Community, an initiative that is supported by the World Economic Forum and part of a network of 408 hubs spread throughout the globe. With 8,875 shapers in 153 countries and 1,837 alumni, the East Jerusalem Hub\* comprises a network of budding and established young changemakers with varying expertise and lived experiences, unified by a common desire to contribute to social and economic advancement at all levels of society in East Jerusalem.

With tens of ongoing projects, Jerusalemite young and brilliant minds are looking for technical and financial support to help turn their ideas into viable businesses. JEST will continue to support these enterprises and strive to attract new ideas to be fostered.

A focal point for business development, strategic planning, marketing, and access to local, regional, and global markets, JEST provides a home for the start-up community of Jerusalem, helping businesses achieve growth and success and live up to their full potential. Through cooperation and partnerships, JEST engages to promote technology development and a culture of innovation, and to support women.

Article photos by Omar Amireh.

\*For more information, please visit <https://www.globalshapers.org/hubs/east-jerusalem-hub>.

