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## Feature - Growing the fleet: E-infrastructure in the Mediterranean

On average, Mediterranean countries dedicate only one percent of their Gross Domestic Product to research. This, says Federico Ruggieri, project manager of [EUMEDGRID](#), is one of the reasons why e-infrastructure is so crucial to development in the Mediterranean region.

The catch is this: limited funding makes it difficult for a developing country to create and support its own e-infrastructure, but e-infrastructure makes it possible to collaborate with other countries, thus providing more bang for your buck.

"This is a typical chicken-and-egg problem," comments Ruggieri. "We are working to break it, otherwise researchers in the region won't ever exploit leading edge technologies."

"We often speak of 'developing countries'," he said, "and this may be misleading, because all countries are indeed developing, but some need to develop faster, or they'll never catch up and the digital gap will never close."

For international e-infrastructure collaborations to work, Ruggieri says it is people, not technology, that must lead the way.

"There should be investment, of course, but it should be coordinated, so as not to disperse effort," he says. "This process can be supported, but it cannot be driven from the outside; each country needs to find its own model, taking into account the efforts of neighboring countries."

Ruggieri says an essential part of coordinating the shift to e-infrastructure is communication: bringing together the researchers, decision makers and government officials who can steer each fledgling ship to become one part of a competitive fleet.

As part of this effort, this month the [Jordanian Universities Network](#) (JUNet) and the Jordanian National Research and Education Network hosted a [week-long seminar](#) dedicated to discussing the role of e-infrastructure in promoting development and fighting brain drain in developing countries.



A look at Europe by night clearly shows the digital divide of South Eastern Europe.  
Image courtesy of [SEE-GRID](#)



The [first EUMEDGRID Grid School](#) was held in Cairo, Egypt, from 17-28 April 2007. Nine applications from fields including biology, engineering, mathematics, physics and cognitive science were selected.

Image courtesy of EUMEDGRID

The seminar attracted delegates from Jordan, Syria, Greece, Italy, Morocco, Switzerland, Tunisia, Cyprus and the Palestinian territories. Jordanian Ministries also took part in the event, which was blessed by HRH Princess Sumayya, who is deeply involved in promoting research in her country.

A. Armanzi, general manager of the Scientific Research Center, Syria, said the conference generated much enthusiasm: "The experiences presented in this seminar are very useful to find motivation and justification to fund e-infrastructure and, in the meanwhile, to generate internal support in the countries."

Yusef Torman, director of JUNet, agreed: "I am confident that this event has created better awareness, at both the user and political level, about the importance of research networks and the [EUMEDCONNECT](#) and EUMEDGRID projects. The event will also be the first step towards the creation of a National Grid Initiative in Jordan. I plan to submit a proposal to the Ministry in a month," he says.

*The EUMEDGRID project aims to set up a grid infrastructure for e-research in the Mediterranean, with the intention of integrating with [EGEE](#) and similar*

*initiatives in the Balkans, North Europe, Latin America and Far-East Asia. After 18 months, the EUMEDGRID testbed is composed of 13 sites in ten countries, including Algeria, Cyprus, Egypt, Malta, Morocco, Tunisia and—joining right now—Syria.*

- Cristy Burne, iSGTW



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