

Equal by Nature by Malta Chamber of Scientists

The project used the principles of genetics to build bridges between people of different nationalities. The main aim of the project was that of offering its identified community a better understanding of the basic principles of genetics to tear down old, stereotypical ideas about race. According to evidence-based science research studies, race is not supported by scientific evidence but it is socially constructed.

The hands-on, engaging workshops were led by various STEM professionals. The workshops on genetics were led by various researchers working within the fields of genetics including Prof. Joseph Borg, a professor at the Faculty of Applied Biomedical Sciences at the University of Malta, Dr Emma Clarke, a geneticist, and Dr Edward Duca, Malta Chamber of Scientists Secretary, and Lecturer within the Faculty of Education, University of Malta. On the other hand, the workshops that tackled the ‘Arts’ in STEAM were facilitated by Prof. Raphael Vella, a professor within the Faculty of Education with a specialisation in Arts, Open Communities, and Adult Education. Dr Maria Pisani, Senior Lecturer of Youth & Community Studies within the Faculty for Social Wellbeing at the University of Malta was also involved as a mediator between scientists and asylum seekers and migrants.

In addition, since the project tackled an underrepresented group in society, it was deemed challenging to reach the communities targeted – asylum seekers and migrants. However, in the end, the beneficiaries managed to engage a substantial number of participants, with the majority describing their experience as being a positive one, particularly since they were given a voice to share their views verbally and artistically. This is further substantiated by one of the science communicators, Dr Emma Clarke, who formed part of the genetics workshop,

“I’m proud that we managed to bring people from marginalised identities into a lab space and talk about the subjects in a way that seemed to engage them well. I’m proud we created a welcoming space where people were able to share their thoughts and stories.”

Moreover, one of the strengths of this project was its ability to amalgamate the sciences with the arts by first facilitating the community participants’ understanding of their genetic make-up and how this attributes to the different skin colours that humans from across the world express physically and then proceeding by allowing community members to express what they’ve learnt through the use of arts. During the second phase, a banner was constructed to form part of the Science in the City Festival (SITC). Alongside that, one of the migrant participants, who is also a talented artist, was also requested to create a painting for the SITC Festival to explain his understanding of “race” being a social construct. This painting is now permanently exhibited at Esplora Interactive Science Centre in the Chemistry Section, Mezzanine Area, Exhibition Hall Level 2.

Despite the fact that this project came to an end, its legacy continues particularly since it managed to break the stereotype and social injustices based on race, managed to make STEM accessible to a wider community and hence, breaking the ‘elitist’ and

‘exclusionary’ barriers attributed to STEM fields. A disappointing part of the workshop was that locals were not attracted to these workshops, despite direct marketing and local NGOs promising to send volunteers. This moved the workshop coordinators to state that, were they to do them again, they would make a more concerted effort to include local people in these workshops to represent different groups.

As a legacy, the MCS intends to continue to work with this group to support the ideas they shared in the final workshop. This future project will continue to drive the point that the concept of divergent human races has no foundation in science. We are all equal by nature.

