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# Good practices guide: social economy in Europe

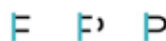
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*The project as a whole engaged professionals and the organisations interested in and operating in the field of social economy in Romania, as well as vulnerable people who could be the beneficiaries and leaders of social enterprises. In addition to training modules, a number of tools were created, including this publication, which gives a wider European perspective. Two of the other instruments are described at the end of this publication - standards for two new occupations (Social Enterprise Manager and Social Economy Expert), plus the newly developed social brand, „MATCA”.*

*"Good practices guide: social economy in Europe" was developed by KARAT Coalition, researched and authored by Joanna Szaburko and Pamela Wells, with research support from Agnieszka Walko-Mazurek. Additional input was provided by the National Association of Human Resources Specialists ("AUR"-ANSRU) with regards to the examples of Romanian good practice and the instruments developed within the wider project, written by Raluca Manaila, Bogdan Diaconu Moga and Nicolae Badea, with layout/design by Maxim Serbu.*

*KARAT Coalition unites over 63 organisations from 25 countries focused on women's human rights, and gender justice in the Region of Central & Eastern Europe and Central Asia.*

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*National Association of Human Resources Specialists ("AUR"-ANSRU):*

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## Glossary of Terms

These terms are difficult to specify and the legal regulations vary from country to country, These are definitions as they are being used in Romania.

**Social economy** is "the type of economy that effectively combines individual with collective responsibility in the view of producing goods and/or provision of services, that aims for economic and social development of a community and whose main purpose is social benefit. Social economy is based on private, voluntary and joint initiative, with a high degree of autonomy and responsibility and assumes economic risks and limited profit distribution." (UNDP Romania, 2012)

**A social enterprise** is an organisation whose main purpose is to ensure/provide welfare for the community, created by a group of citizens and where the material interests of those who have invested capital are limited. A social enterprise is an independent organisation that takes economic risks derived from its economic activity and whose board involves various stakeholders of the community.

**A cooperative** is an autonomous association of persons, voluntarily united to meet the economic, social, cultural needs and their common aspirations through a company jointly owned and democratically controlled.

**A Mutual Society** is an autonomous association of individual or legal entities, voluntarily united to meet their main common needs of insurance (life and non-life), welfare, health and finance-banking sector, that runs activities subject to competition.

**A Protected Unit/Workshop** is a public or private economic operator, having its own management, in which at least 30% of the total number of employees with individual employment contract are disabled persons.

**Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs)** are private entities, formally organised, autonomous in decision-making process, free to association, that produce non-taxable services for their beneficiaries and whose profit, if any, cannot be appropriated by those who created, controlled or financed them.

## INTRODUCTION

### Good practices guide – what is this?

The good practice guide which you are about to read presents 20 examples of social economy initiatives from different European countries. Descriptions of the examples include a factual overview for each initiative, with background information and aims, the target group for its work, its structure and activities. Additionally, there is information about the initiative's partnerships and about the promotion tools it uses. Each description has also been enhanced with reflections on the successes and challenges as well as lessons learned by these enterprises.

In a separate chapter, "Tips for success" are gathered as conclusions drawn from the experience of the presented social economy initiatives. These have been enriched by the comments and reflections of experts specialising in human resources issues, business development and support for social economy.

This guide brings together the practical experience of the social entrepreneurs and the expertise of people experienced in developing and supporting social and commercial business. This combination makes the publication comprehensive and useful for different groups of readers interested in various aspects of social economy.

### Who is this guide for?

This good practice guide has been prepared for those who want to become social entrepreneurs and start their own social economy initiative. It can also be useful for those who support future social entrepreneurs, for example institutions and organisations promoting social economy, facilitating the economic activation of unemployed and the integration of other vulnerable groups into the labour market. Finally, the guide is addressed to all who want to find out how social economy enterprises work in different countries. It is aimed at providing readers with

information, inspiration as well as tips for success.

### What we were looking for while preparing the guide?

The aim of the guide is to present a variety of social economy initiatives functioning in Europe. Therefore, the selection of enterprises described in the publication covers examples from a number of European countries and includes different social economy models, from the Italian system based on cooperatives to the UK's model focusing on non-profit organisations and community interested companies. The guide contains quite a few examples from Poland, where the social economy sector is still being shaped. Because of the similarities between Poland and Romania, it seemed logical to share the experience of these enterprises. The guide includes presentations of initiatives established with various aims, among them enterprises focusing on sustainable development and protection of the environment as well as social cooperatives providing jobs for vulnerable groups. The described initiatives have different structures and different areas of work. They are producers as well as providers of services. They build partnerships with various actors, including businesses and local communities. The presented initiatives answer to a variety of needs and have different backgrounds. Some of them have been created by individuals, and other by groups of people. Some are implementing an innovative vision for socially responsible business, while others were established by employees of bankrupted companies who wanted to continue working in their field. All together, the examples gathered in this guide reflect a diversity in the world of social economy initiatives. The selection was made with the aim of presenting examples suitable for duplication in the emerging Romanian context, as well as describing those more developed initiatives in order to illustrate the possibilities for social economy development in the longer perspective.

## How did we find them?

This guide has been prepared based on information gathered through desk research as well as through interviews with representatives of the presented social economy initiatives and experts in related fields. Most of the enterprises described in the guide have been finalists or winners of best social enterprise competitions in their respective countries, or were presented in directories or publications showcasing best practice. Many of the cases presented are being promoted as good examples of social economy by various organisations or institutions in their countries.

Examples from Poland are, for the most part, initiatives promoted in the Atlas of Good Practices in Social Economy. This was developed by the Foundation for Social and Economic Initiatives (FISE), one of the key organisations promoting social economy in Poland, utilising a systemic approach aimed at increasing employment, especially among professionally inactive groups. These enterprises have been functioning for more than two years, are successful in fulfilling their economic and social goals, are transparent and willing to share their experience. Some of them have been awarded with the Polish Social Economy certificate "znak [eS]", which was also created by FISE.

Most of the examples from Spain have been awarded by the Momentum Project, which was created by the companies BBVA and ESADE in collaboration with PwC. The Momentum Project awards the most outstanding initiatives, based on criteria of experience, significant social impact, innovation, scaling potential and economic sustainability. From the UK, many hold the Social Enterprise Mark and some of French enterprises presented are run by social entrepreneurs who have been awarded by Ashoka or the Schwab Foundation. Others were recommended by experts in the field of social economy for the given country. All of them have been recognised as good practices in social economy.

## EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICES IN SOCIAL ECONOMY

### Good practices at a glance

Name	Area	People	Country
Acta Vista	Restoring historic heritage and maintaining natural sites	Low qualified unemployed	France
Alexis Cooperative	Textile production	Unemployed, mainly women	Poland
Atentis	Production of personalised gifts for companies, services in the area of visual media communication	People with sensory, physical or intellectual disabilities	Spain
Bajkolandia Cooperative	Childcare services, birthing school, costume rental for children	Unemployed, working parents	Poland
The Big Issue	Production of weekly entertainment and current affairs magazine	Homeless people	UK
Care and Share Associates	Services to older and disabled people living in their own homes	Older and disabled people	UK
Catering Solidario	Catering services	Women who suffered from domestic violence	Spain
Cosmic Ethical IT	Making websites and providing technical support, as well as training and consultancy	People who, for a range of reasons, are disadvantaged in their use of digital technologies	UK
DUMBRĂVIȚA for People	Woven baskets	Roma people	Romania
EKON- Association of Disabled people for Environment	Ecological waste management	People with intellectual disabilities and mental illnesses	Poland

Emma Hostel	Environmentally friendly hostel promoting cooperative movement	Unemployed	Poland
Glass World Cooperative	Production of Christmas glass ornaments	Unemployed	Poland
Hercules	Intergenerational centre and vegetable garden	Disadvantaged people in Costești	Romania
La Tavella	Organic farm	People with mental disabilities or severe mental disorders	Spain
Le Mat	Hotel franchise promoting sustainable tourism	Disadvantaged groups, tourists	Italy
Mom's Cooperative	Production of handcraft products	Mothers	Poland
Optimones	Childcare services	Working parents and their children	France
Re Tech Life Onulus	Electronic waste management, recovering of electronic equipment	Prisoners and former prisoners	Italy
Sineo	Waterless car wash services and selling biodegradable car cleaning products	People in need of social reintegration	France
Sostre Civic	Housing cooperative offering accessible housing	Members of the cooperative, people who need housing	Spain
Viewpoint Research	Research service, conducted by telephone, online and in-person	Blind and partially sighted people, long-term unemployed	UK
ViitorPlus	Sustainable development	People in need of social and professional reintegration; disabled	Romania
Wandzin Eko School of Life	Farm promoting ecological and traditional agricultures, health care facility	Drug and alcohol addicts, people with HIV/AIDS	Poland



### INTRODUCTION

Acta Vista is a non-profit initiative founded in 2002. It addresses the need for the preservation of historic monuments and natural sites in France, and contributes to lowering unemployment especially among those low qualifications. By involving people with difficult life situation in projects restoring historic heritage and maintaining natural sites, Acta Vista provides them with training and work experience which make them qualified for future long-term employment in the building trade. Acta Vista was established by Arnaud Castagnède, an engineer and cartographer by training, inspired by an experimental environmental restoration programmes linking entrepreneurship and community development in South America. ActaVista is a result of his attempts to spread this idea in France.

### AIM(s)

Acta Vista aims to facilitate the integration of unemployed people into the labour market, where they profitably regain their dignity and independence with long-term employment. At the same time, it appreciates the valuable historical heritage of France and its natural environment and aims to contribute to its preservation. It follows and promotes the idea of sustainable development with the aim of preserving historic heritage and the natural environment for future generations.

Acta Vista also is committed to upholding its values. These include social innovation and solidarity with the most disadvantaged populations, equal opportunities and respect for social and cultural diversity, as well as professionalism and integrity of its staff.

### TARGET GROUP(s)

The beneficiaries of Acta Vista are unemployed

people between the ages of 18 and 65. In order to reach them, Acta Vista cooperates with recruitment agencies, through which it announces its jobs offers. Other partners in the recruitment process are institutions and organisations focusing on resocialisation work, as well as public institutions active in local communities. They all help Acta Vista to spread information about the opportunities it offers to the unemployed and to facilitate contact with the organisation.

Because Acta Vista is an initiative guided by the idea of linking entrepreneurship with local development, local communities are also beneficiaries of its activities. Their historic heritage as well as natural environment benefit from the restoration and maintenance ensured by Acta Vista.

### STRUCTURE

Acta Vista is a non-profit organisation, but its model includes a certain degree of cost-recovery by offering the goods and services to various public and private institutions. The Acta Vista initiative operates through three main bodies: Acta Vista Association, BAO which is its training body, and a newly established social enterprise Monuments and Habitats (M&H). They have separate structures and staff.

Acta Vista Association focuses on the general financial, technical and pedagogical management of the initiative, supporting beneficiaries in their efforts towards long-term employment in addition to the day-to-day managing of construction and restoration projects, including overseeing the construction sites. The Association is governed by seven Board members and managed by a General Manager, an Operational Manager, and an Administration and Financial Manager. There are 12 more members of staff focusing on direct work with the beneficiaries, technical support, administration and communication.

BAO is a training agency, established by Acta Vista in 2005. It is authorised to certify several professions in the trade of building restoration. It prepares people employed by Acta Vista to the work as construction workers, eco-construction workers or stone masons. BAO has its own statute and a staff of 18, which includes management and administration employees, foremen, fellow trainers and experts.

M&H is a social enterprise working on construction, renovation, and ecological rehabilitation in order to promote social housing. It was established by Acta Vista Association to better utilise business opportunities for the initiative by obtaining construction and restoration contracts. M&H is a commercial entity and as such is subject to tax and legal obligations, like any traditional business, and it is positioned on the competitive market. It therefore seeks to constantly adapt to market needs. Through M&H, the initiative is able to establish effective partnerships with other companies that have complementary skills in order to answer to public procurement tenders. M&H will offer fixed-term contracts for some of the people previously working on Acta Vista Association's construction projects. Thanks to a participatory mode of operation, an employee may move to a permanent position and become minority shareholder of the company, benefiting from dividends paid by the company to its staff.

## ACTIVITIES

Through its structures, Acta Vista recruits and provides professional training for unqualified individuals seeking employment in the building, logistics and environmental sectors. It develops the beneficiaries' skills in carpentry, stone cutting and bricklaying for older buildings which can be used in construction, eco-construction and restoration works. The beneficiaries trained by BAO are employed on Acta Vista's construction sites with contracts with lasting 12 months or less. During this time, they are able to

strengthen their professional skills, regain their dignity and status in society, and rediscover the dynamism of teamwork. This work empowers the beneficiaries and prepares them to look for long-term employment with other companies in the building sector. During this one year contract, the employees are offered coaching support and may work on their financial, health, housing and professional situation thanks to analysis and advice from worksite managers, psychologists and local social service representatives.

Acta Vista gains work orders through public procurement tenders that take into account social integration clauses. The organisation also asks local authorities to make historic buildings available to Acta Vista, as a way to support for its activities in exchange for their restoration and revitalisation. Acta Vista projects focus on restoration of historic heritage, maintaining natural environment sites and the ecological building of social housing. All of these projects are implemented in line with tenets of sustainable development. Acta Vista uses environmentally friendly materials and reduces the use of energy to a minimum. It also tries to answer the needs of local communities.



An example of Acta Vista's work is the renovation of the buildings of Fort d'Entrecasteaux, located in the hills of Marseille. Acta Vista is currently implementing the second phase of this project, which will be completed in 2015. The Fort will become the initiative's operational base and training centre, enabling Acta Vista to continue to pursue its mission. While implementing this project, Acta Vista aims to involve around 600 candidates recruited by local partners and conduct 180,000 hours of training. The employees hired to work on this site will develop skills in masonry for older buildings, and raise their awareness about eco-construction, energy efficiency and eco-citizenship. This project strives to become a showcase for Acta Vista's comprehensive sustainable development approach. Combining environmentally friendly activities with social integration for the unemployed, it is simultaneously preserving and promoting local historic and cultural heritage.

## MARKETING

Acta Vista has invested in building trusting relations with its partners, supporters, volunteers and donors. Since it constantly seeks funding for its initiatives, Acta Vista is very committed to open communication and cooperation with its supporters. In order to manage the grants from its sponsors and guarantee good accountability for the financial support it receives, Acta Vista created the "Vitruve pour le Patrimoine et les Hommes" fund. Potential donors are encouraged to make financial or in-kind donations and to support the project that best embodies their interests, priorities, history and the nature of their business. Another option is "patronage of competence" where the supporting company can delegate an employee within his or her working hours to support Acta Vista with legal or tax related tasks, for example.

Acta Vista motivates its supporters by promising that their contributions will enhance conscious

safeguarding of the national heritage and historical monuments, preserving the biodiversity and traditional know-how. Their support will also contribute to social cohesion and the employability of people at risk of exclusion.

## CERTIFICATES

Acta Vista has gained a number of certificates verifying the quality and standards of its work in different areas. It is certified by the National Association for Adult Vocational Training as an Approved Training Organisation and is able to conduct training related to a number of professions in the restoration and building trade. Acta Vista has also been recognised by the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Vocational Training as an approved organisation of social utility.

The enterprise is also a holder of the ISO 14001 certification, which is an environmental management standard. This identifies organisations that uphold a number of environmental requirements and utilise an environmental management system. The aim of this is to encourage organisations to protect the environment in various aspects such as preventing pollution. Apart from being certified itself, Acta Vista is also authorised to use certified ecological building and restoration techniques, such insulation using of hemp and lime.

Acta Vista is in the process of obtaining the label IDEAS, issued by an independent committee. This would confirm the organisation's financial transparency and the economic viability of its projects, including title sponsorship. It also has started the process for obtaining the Diversity label, which certifies managerial performance in terms of non-discrimination, equal opportunities and proactive and preventive managing of human resources.

## PARTNERSHIP(s)

The list of Acta Vista's affiliations and partners is impressive. It includes French professional organisations and social entrepreneurial networks where Acta Vista has membership, as well as international organisations that it cooperates with (i.e. International Council on Monuments and Sites, the Schwab Foundation for Social Entrepreneurship, Ashoka International, etc). These are mostly related to the development and promotion of social entrepreneurship.

Among Acta Vista's partners, there are also a number of public and private employment agencies with which Acta Vista cooperates while recruiting beneficiaries for its projects. Another group of partners are national and local public institutions which cooperate with or subcontract Acta Vista to gain and implement its restoration and maintenance projects. These include a number of French ministries (Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Ministry of Defence, etc.), other public institutions such as the French Environment and Energy Management Agency (ADEME) and local governments, among them the City of Marseille and authorities from a number of provinces.



Finally, Acta Vista has a number of patrons who support its work with donations and common projects. Among those there are various foundations, companies and institutions. All of the partners and supporters get the recognition on Acta Vista's website.

## SUCSESSES

According to Arnaud Castagnède, the Director of Acta Vista, the main success of the organisation has been the creation of an efficient model for reintegration of unemployed into the labour market. Acta Vista's practical approach, with tailored training programmes implemented directly on construction sites, proves to be especially effective.

During the ten years of its existence, Acta Vista has recruited over 3,800 job seekers to its programme. The organisation conducts around 200,000 hours of training and employs over 300 people each year. About 90% of Acta Vista employees who apply for certification of their professional skills are successful. More than half of the beneficiaries continue with employment in this sector with other companies, after taking part in Acta Vista's programme.

Acta Vista has been recognised by a number of institutions. For two years in a row, it won the Schwab Foundation's competition for Social Entrepreneur of the Year in France, in 2005 and 2006. It was awarded the Masters of Entrepreneurship prize of at the National Contractors Exhibition in 2002. It also received the PACA CSR Award in 2010, and was chosen as Social Entrepreneur of the Year 2010 in a competition organised by Ashoka.

## CHALLENGES

The main challenge at the beginning of Acta Vista's work was adopting the training programmes to the actual needs of the construction sites. It was also difficult at first to efficiently train the low-qualified unemployed people. Time and experience made a difference, so that the programme was adapted and became more effective.

Relations with local authorities were also challenging at the beginning. Again, it took time to overcome this and to prove themselves, but a growing number of effective projects – and a lot of energy invested in building good relations – helped to gain the necessary trust.

Currently, the main challenge for Acta Vista is cooperation with other construction companies on their work sites. It is difficult to merge different approaches, but hopefully this will be achieved.

## LESSONS LEARNED

Acta Vista wants to share its experience with groups in other countries and help them to develop similar models of social enterprises which can contribute to the preservation of historic heritage and the diminishing of unemployment. To this end, the organisation is undertaking an international project funded by the EU's Leonardo da Vinci programme, which aims to develop a common training methodology with partners in Cyprus, Malta and Italy.

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### INTRODUCTION

Alexis Cooperative was established in 2010 by a group of five women who found themselves unemployed after losing their jobs in a textile company. They decided to continue working together in the same sector and, with the support of local public institutions, they created the first social economy initiative in Łomża, a medium sized town in north east Poland. Alexis Cooperative produces and sells textile products to a number of clients in Poland and abroad.

### AIM(s)

The aim of Alexis cooperative is to provide jobs for unemployed members of the local community, to create a stable and friendly work place, and to support other social cooperatives which have just begin their activities.

Alexis Cooperative also aims to be a reliable, recognised and prospering producer of textile products, valued for its professionalism and high quality work.

### TARGET GROUP(s)

The main target group of Alexis's activities are members of the cooperative, and also unemployed homeless people with difficult life situations, or disabled people who – according to the cooperative's statute – can be employed by Alexis.

Other groups in the local community can be mentioned as beneficiaries of Alexis, including the future social entrepreneurs who are supported by the cooperative with advisory activities, and also local social institutions with whom Alexis cooperates by providing occupational trainings.

### STRUCTURE

Alexis is a social cooperative. It was established by five women but it grew over time. Currently, the cooperative employs around 30 people, eight

of whom are cooperative members. The majority of them work at the production site, with two members taking care of the management and administration of the cooperative. All of them meet regularly to discuss the current developments of the cooperative. Problematic issues are solved by the members who try to reach consensus. In cases where this is not possible, the decision is reached by the majority of votes. The day-to-day functioning is managed by a president and the cooperative's Board.

As a newly established social cooperative, Alexis received support from the Labour Office in the form of a loan for each cooperative member, which is non-repayable as long as the established cooperative functions longer than one year. The new cooperative also received reliefs from social benefit payments. For the first two years, these benefits are paid by the government and during the third year the cooperative pays half.

### ACTIVITIES

Alexis manufactures a variety of textile products, such as bed linen made from various types of fabrics, decorative textiles, hotel textiles and bags. The cooperative realises orders from a number of clients including large retailers, such as Real, Tesco and Jysk, hospitals and hotel companies. The products of Alexis are sold in shops in Łomża as well as through the clients' retail chains in different countries. Alexis has managed to secure a number of regular clients, which provides the cooperative a relatively stable development and allows the creation of additional work places.

Production is organised in a workshop located in a rented building provided by the local authorities. Professional equipment was secured by the cooperative members themselves, having invested their compensation funds received upon termination of their employment by their previous employer. The cooperative members are constantly working to improve the standards of their workshop as well as working conditions.

Apart from intensive regular production work, which is the core activity of Alexis, the cooperative also engages in a number of projects aimed at occupational activation of various vulnerable groups, as well as supporting the development of other social economy initiatives.

The cooperative members cooperate with the local Social Integration Center, which aims to activate various vulnerable groups into the labour market by providing them with vocational training, internship opportunities and other skills development programs. The members of Alexis Cooperative train one of these groups to be professional seamstresses and offer the possibility of future employment in the cooperative.

Alexis also engages in projects supporting potential social entrepreneurs. The cooperative shares its experience in establishing and running a social cooperative or provides more practical support, as is the case with Delta Cooperative, which became a subcontractor of Alexis. This newly established "sister cooperative" – as the Alexis members call Delta – in addition to its own activities, also helps Alexis to realise orders during intensive periods of high demand. This provides the new enterprise with valuable additional income, which contributes to its stability during the difficult initial period of activities.

## **MARKETING**

According to the cooperative members, they do not have problems with gaining orders. They say their marketing strategy rests in the quality of their products, thanks to which Alexis is recommended to other potential clients.

The cooperative has not so far invested in promotion through media and electronic communication. Despite this, when it first started operations, Alexis had to face an incredulous attitude of potential clients who were not convinced about the reliability of a social economy entity. This obstacle was overcome as

soon as the cooperation started production and when Alexis provided high quality products in a timely manner. Today, in its promotion materials, Alexis stresses the fact that it is the first social cooperative in its region.

## **PARTNERSHIP(s)**

The establishing of Alexis Cooperative would not have been possible without its dedicated members who had a clear vision and a practical plan for its activities as a new enterprise. Still, partnership with local authorities and the Labour Office in Łomża were particularly important in facilitating the development of the initiative as a social economy entity. Local institutions supported the women from Alexis to utilise the instruments of social economy.

They benefited from the funds allocated for the development of social economy enterprises awarded by the Labour Office. Local authorities helped the newly established cooperative by offering preferential rental rates on the premises for Alexis. They also promoted the cooperative in media and in the local community, engaging it as a partner in a number of projects aimed at social inclusion or occupational activation of different groups, or development of social economy in the region.

## CERTIFICATES

In 2012 Alexis found itself among the finalists of the contest for Social Enterprise of the Year organised in Poland by the Foundation for Social and Economic Initiatives (FISE). As such, it was awarded with the Social economy Enterprise Sign [eS], which certifies enterprises fulfilling a number of economic and social criteria (i.e. a quota for annual income, how long it's been operating, implementation of social goals). The awarding of the [eS] is preceded by a thorough check up by FISE experts, including a study visit to the assessed enterprise.

Apart from being certified itself, Alexis uses in its production process a number of certified fabrics, especially those meeting the technical requirements for materials used in the production of articles to be used in hospital and hotels.

## SUCSESSES

The most important achievement of Alexis Cooperative is its economic success. The cooperative is well functioning and profitable enterprise. It has managed to establish good relations between the cooperative members and employees, as well as with clients and suppliers. Alexis has gained recognition as a reliable enterprise and a good business partner.

At the same time, Alexis is successful in achieving its social goals: providing work places for long term unemployed, disabled and people in difficult life situations. Starting with just five people, it currently employs 30. In addition, it provides jobs for five members of its "sister cooperative" Delta by subcontracting additional orders to them.

As the first social cooperative in the area, Alexis Cooperative has also paved the way for the development of social economy in their region. Being a successful social enterprise, it became an empowering example for others who wanted to follow their way of approaching entrepreneurship.

What is important, however, is that Alexis provides support for potential and new social entrepreneurs by sharing its practical experience, including that related to challenges and obstacles in social economy.

## CHALLENGES

As is the case for most initiatives, it also was a difficult time for Alexis Cooperative when it first started. This was not only because of the financial instability, but also because there were an enormous number of formalities to fulfill during the initial period of their existence. The challenges included a whole variety of problems, starting from the preparation of the cooperative's statute right through to ensuring cash flow.

"The first year was long and painful. The funds from the Labour Office were enough to set up the production site. Still, at the same time we had to pay for the raw materials, rental costs and workers' salaries, while waiting for payments from implemented orders. The problem with cash flow is a serious obstacle in the case of a mass production enterprise" stresses Barbara Duda, the president of Alexis.

The problems during the initial period of Alexis' functioning were solved thanks to additional investment by the cooperative's members from their own funds, as well as one client who made paid promptly for orders immediately after they were realised. With time, the cooperative managed to secure a number of regular clients, which ensured a relatively stable functioning.

Making a start for social economy in the region was an accomplishment for Alexis, as the first social cooperative in the area, but it was also challenging. There were no other experienced enterprises that could provide them with advice, nor did the local authorities or public servants fully understood what social economy was all about or how they could support it.



Also, their potential suppliers of raw materials and clients were suspicious about this new form of enterprise. Sometimes, they imposed extra conditions such as upfront payments in cash.

## LESSONS LEARNED

According to Alexis' members, in order to run a social economy enterprise, one has to be determined and prepared for investment. Therefore, it is important to know exactly what you are planning to do and to prepare a realistic business plan in order to minimise the risk for investors – the members of the cooperative. It should be based on thorough market analysis in the sector where the enterprise is going to be active. Identifying suppliers and potential clients, it is necessary to calculate prices in order to be competitive but also to bring profit. In the case of a production-focused enterprise, it is crucial to think in advance about distribution channels for the manufactured goods. This is due to the significant investments required upfront, such as organising the production site and purchasing raw materials. For Alexis Cooperative, an invaluable advantage was the members' experience gained from previous jobs about running a textile producing enterprise, plus the fact that they started their own enterprise with a list of potential clients who knew them as reliable contractors.

The members of the cooperative underline that it is very important to start an enterprise with a group of people that are engaged and can be relied on. Rules about cooperating should be set, and followed. There should be solidarity with a shared vision and shared responsibility, but having a strong leader supported by others is a good solution, especially at the beginning.

The example of Alexis also shows that it is definitely worth seeking the support of local authorities and public institutions, and to utilise the support offered by the various organisations aiming to develop social economy. Especially

helpful is to observe social economy in action, for example through study visits.

Benefiting from the practical experience of others is something that members of Alexis Cooperative highlight, and this comes particularly from their involvement as a partner in a number of projects aimed at supporting the development of social economy. Often the emphasis is put on theoretical training about the ideas of social economy enterprises – how it contributes to local development and about equally sharing profits – while not sufficient focus is placed on how to achieve these profits.

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### INTRODUCTION

Atentis is a company based in Madrid, established in 2008, which operates a large-format digital printing service as well as producing personalised gifts and promotion articles for companies. It started as a smaller enterprise making handcrafted Christmas gift baskets, run by Rodolfo Moreno-Manzanaro and Begoña de Torres-Peralta. They started by subcontracting work to disabled people. It proved to be such a positive experience that they decided to employ disabled people permanently and transformed the company into a special employment center, which is what Atentis is today. It changed its profile in order to better answer the needs of its clients and widened its offer beyond the Christmas period. Atentis is focused on providing disabled people with opportunities to express their talent and creativity and to transform disability into a benefit through the work at Atentis. The company involves itself in a number of CSR and educational projects, in partnerships with companies and foundations that work with disabled people.

### AIM(s)

The aim of Atentis is to integrate disabled people into the labour market. In particular, Atentis aims at providing jobs and creating a work environment which enables the disabled to be creative and use their talents, while providing high-quality products answering the needs of the clients. The founders of Atentis themselves have indeed answered the needs of supporting the disabled by organising their workplaces. Through their activities of providing professionally realised services to businesses with the use of new technologies, they also aim to break the stereotype regarding the low value of the work of disabled and to contribute to the recognition of this group on the labour market.

### TARGET GROUP(s)

Three main groups are addressed with Atentis

activities. In the first group are people with sensory, physical or intellectual disabilities, the employees of Atentis. The second would be its clients, companies placing orders at Atentis. Finally, the third group consists of foundations working with disabled people, that often become partners of Atentis.

Despite the fact that Atentis aims to provide jobs for disabled people, they are not hired based on this criteria. What is primarily taken into account are their talents, training and desire to work. In 2012, the staff of Atentis included six people with disabilities. This number is usually larger during the Christmas season, and it may reach 17 people.

The recruitment of employees is facilitated through employment agencies specialising in working with disabled, by placing job offers on websites and from CVs sent directly to Atentis. For the first month, the new employees are being prepared to work in different positions at Atentis. They are trained to use the software as well as handling the machinery. They get acquainted with their job descriptions and the method of work. During the preparation period, the employees are accompanied by the head of workshop who teaches them everything they need to know and to be able to do.

### STRUCTURE

Atentis has the status of a Special Employment Centre in Spain (Centro Especial de Empleo). It means that it is a company in which disabled people with at least a 33% reduction in their working capacity constitute at least 70% of the employees. Social inclusion and integration into the labour market are the main goals of these Centres. At the same time the Centres are companies carrying out economic activities, providing paid jobs and are subjected to the same rules as with any company.

## ACTIVITIES

The activities of Atentis involve the production of personalised gifts for companies, services in the area of visual media communication as well as awareness raising activities focusing on disability.

The personalised gifts for companies produced by Atentis, like t-shirts or mugs, are decorated with graphic applications. These are ordered by companies as promotion articles. Some of these products are made as part of awareness raising projects such as Artedown. This is a pioneering initiative of the Down Syndrome Foundation in Madrid which, since 1993, has been promoting the artistic works of its members. Within the Artedown project, Atentis has developed a wide range of products including reproductions of designs in different formats as well as bags, t-shirts, aprons and caps decorated with the graphics of artists with down syndrome.

Atentis also offers a number of services in the field of visual communication media. These include lettering, graphic design, and offset or digital printing with large formats outputs for indoor and outdoor settings. These services are also provided by the disabled workers.

In order to contribute to the integration of disabled into the professional business world and to overcome stereotypes, Atentis undertakes awareness raising activities focused on disability. An example of such an integration project, which usually focus on art and design, is Atedicap. As part of this program, the employees of commercial companies are invited to observe what the daily work looks like at a Special Center of Employment. They take part in a workshop conducted by the graphic designers and technical staff of Atentis, aimed at providing the employees of companies taking part in the project an opportunity for professional interaction with disabled people. It is an opportunity to learn what challenges the disabled face in the work place and how they

are dealing with them. Atedicap is designed as a training workshop including role playing and it is adapted to the needs of participating company.

## PARTNERSHIP(s)

The main partners for Atentis are its clients – various companies placing orders at the center. Atentis approaches its future clients through direct marketing, mostly phone calls, and the determination, persuasion and patience bring the desired results. On the list of Atentis' clients are Sodexo – a consultancy company, LM – a leader in the wind turbine industry, Cetelem – a European consumer credit group, Mölnlycke – a health care company, plus well known multinational corporations such as ING Direct Banking, L'Oreal and Coca-Cola.

Atentis not only provides products and services to its clients, but also provides them with opportunities to be involved in social projects. A good example would be a painting contest for the artists with down syndrome, sponsored by a business. The company decides on the theme of the contest. It could be a new design for its logo. Atentis is responsible for organising the contest, including a final exhibition of the submitted works, which is also a promotion event for the sponsoring company. The winning entries can be used in the production of company's customised gifts.

During the recruitment of employees as well as for a number of awareness raising projects, Atentis also cooperates with various foundations, among them the Abracadabra Foundation and the Down Syndrome Foundation.

## MARKETING

When asked about the reasons that companies choose Atentis over other subcontractors, the project coordinator Begoña de Torres-Peralta listed a few qualities that the centre uses to promote its services.

This includes fast delivery, professionalism, personalised samples that often convince the clients to place larger orders, and the social factor. Almost all products of Atentis are labeled with an inscription: "Made by people with different abilities". This aims to challenge people's way of thinking and overcome stereotype that things made by people with disabilities are less professional. Atentis decides to say openly that the products are made by people with disabilities and to promote this fact as a value.

## **CERTIFICATES**

After fulfilling the requirements related to the social goals of integrating disabled people into the labour market, ensuring their social inclusion and meeting the quotas of disabled employees, Atentis was granted a certificate by the local authorities in Madrid as a Special Employment Center.

## **SUCCESES**

Begoña de Torres-Peralta, Project Coordinator at Atentis, identifies a number of the company's successes. The biggest one is that it fulfils its social goal and continues to provide jobs for its employees, which is a particularly important achievement in the context of economic crisis and high unemployment rate in Spain. Another important success is that good relations are maintained with a group of regular clients, among them large companies, who choose Atentis and trust it will provide good quality service.

Finally, the recognition of the Momentum Project – an initiative promoting social economy in Spain, which placed Atentis among top 10 social enterprises in 2012. While selecting the group of winners, the committee of the Momentum Project takes into consideration self-sustainability, business plans, necessary investments and financial control over the enterprise. The awarded enterprises are supported with soft loans or capital investment.

## **CHALLENGES**

As its main challenges, Atentis mentioned human resources related issues. In particular, there is a need to allocate a significant amount of time to prepare workers, including professional training, familiarisation with the tools and technology used at Atentis and adaptation to the working environment. While all these activities are fundamental for the integration of disabled employees, they take time. It is, however, time that is necessary in order to ensure a committed team, which is able to work professionally and to secure income. This is all possible when the work is well organised – another important yet challenging aspect.

## **LESSONS LEARNED**

According to Begoña de Torres-Peralta, to develop an initiative like Atentis, one must have a lot of energy, patience and determination. This is especially true when working in an economic environment affected by crises, as is the situation now in Spain. It is also important to secure financial support, especially at the beginning. Therefore, it is worth investing in networking and building partnerships in order to gather a group of supporters for the new initiative.

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### INTRODUCTION

Bajkolandia ("Fairytale Land") is a playroom for children. It provides childcare on a regularly scheduled basis as well as on demand. Bajkolandia also organises birthday parties and other events for a child and his/her friends. It works to address the needs of the local community in Leżajsk, a town in south-east part of Poland.

The cooperative Bajkolandia was established in December 2010 by five unemployed people – four women and one man – who met at a training workshop recommended by the Labour Office. They learned about social economy and the opportunity to establish a social cooperative, and they came up with the idea of a playroom for children.

### AIM(s)

The aim of Bajkolandia is to provide care for children who are not attending preschool, and to create an environment promoting healthy development where they can gain basic social skills. The cooperative also aims to answer the needs of parents in the local community, in order to enable them more effective reconciliation of professional work and family life. Finally, the goal of Bajkolandia also was to create work places for the members of the cooperative.

### TARGET GROUP(s)

While establishing Bajkolandia, the members of the cooperative wanted to fill the niche created by a deficiency in facilities providing daycare in Leżajsk for children under 4 years of age. Plus, there wasn't any place in the town where children could be looked after on an irregular basis, as such need arose, for one or two hours during the day. Bajkolandia addresses these needs, focusing on the relevant group of parents and children. It also answered the needs of the unemployed members of cooperative.

### STRUCTURE

Bajkolandia is a social cooperative of six members with diverse aptitudes and competencies. Not all of them have pedagogical education or experience, but they have other background skills necessary for the day to day functioning of the cooperative. In particular, economic education and accountancy skills were necessary to manage the cooperative's finances. .

Currently, there are six people working at Bajkolandia. They also have children of their own. Running the childcare facility not only ensured work for them, but also childcare for their children. All of the cooperative's members take care of children and help to organise the occasional events. One person deals with the administration and financial management. The cooperative has its president who is responsible for the organisational coordination; however, all decisions are made jointly by all members of the cooperative. They make sure that Bajkolandia is a democratic community where people are crucial, where everyone takes their own responsibility but also has an influence on how the cooperative is functioning.





## ACTIVITIES

The activities of Bajkolandia involve regular childcare services, occasional childcare as well as organising events for children between 1 and 4 years of age. Bajkolandia takes care of 18 children on daily basis for most of the year. This number increases during the summer vacation period when other childcare facilities take a break or provide limited services.

Most of the time, the children stay at Bajkolandia from Monday till Friday between 7:00 am and 4:00 pm. A number of activities are offered to children, which support their social skills right from this early stage of life. They learn to sing and dance, they have art classes and other activities aimed at developing their imagination. There is also time to rest, and three meals a day are offered to the children. Despite this organised schedule, the caregivers also take into consideration the individual needs of the children and let them play independently. From time to time, the children are taken on a trip or occasional events are organised, for example on Mother's Day or Children's Day. These events are also good opportunities for interaction between cooperative's members and parents and other family members of the children, when they can share ideas and suggestions about Bajkolandia.



On weekends, the cooperative organises birthday parties and other events for children, and sometimes these are outdoor parties. Most of these are subcontracted by public institutions and companies that organise events for employees' children, and not so often by individual clients. This activity generates additional income for Bajkolandia.

The services of Bajkolandia are paid. The parents regulate their bills monthly and the amount is between 250 and 400 PLN depending on the number of hours per day the child spends in Bajkolandia. In cases where a child stays in Bajkolandia irregularly, the payments are made based on hourly rates. This service is often used by parents who come to Leżajsk on business or to deal with official matters, as well as those going to job interviews or who work irregularly and need only occasional childcare support.

In June 2012, Bajkolandia launched a new service – a birthing school, where it organises classes for parents to prepare them for childbirth and to take care of the child in the early period of its life. The classes are conducted by one trained member of the cooperative, plus a professional midwife employed by Bajkolandia. Each course lasts two months and is attended by five couples who meet once a week. This birthing school is the first and only one in Leżajsk.

The latest activity of Bajkolandia is a costume rental for children. About 40 costumes are offered for carnival balls and other events. The cooperative has many other plans to develop its activities, for example, by introducing childcare services at weddings and babysitting on call (service provided at the child's home).

## MARKETING

Bajkolandia promotes its services through its website, advertisements in local press and on the TV. The members of the Cooperative also use printed leaflets and posters, which they distribute in public places - in institutions or hospitals or on announcement board around the town. Still, spreading the word among friends, acquaintances and through clients appears to be the most effective. Personal recommendations have been the most popular channels to gain new clients. This form of promotion also strengthens the cooperative's relations with local community, which is very important for Bajkolandia.

## PARTNERSHIP(s)

Bajkolandia aims to be deeply rooted in the local community and therefore it is focusing on developing partnerships with various local community actors. It all started with the cooperation with the local Labour Office in Leżajsk and the Regional Development Agency, which supported the development of the Cooperative in the first place. The employees of both institutions, apart from regular trainings, provided helpful advice that was useful during the initial period of the cooperative's activities. This included tips for sources of financing and about organising promotion with limited budget.

The technical support of local actors was also crucial in setting up Bajkolandia. The civil servants from the Labour Office enabled Bajkolandia to find an appropriate place for the playroom. The high costs of renovation were partially covered by donations from local entrepreneurs and some of the work was undertaken by students from technical schools, free of charge as a form of support. Bajkolandia also developed a partnership with the management of the hospital in the building where the playroom is located. The cooperatives involves parents through regular consultations in order to assess the needs and

answer them more effectively, which also fosters a good atmosphere and builds sustainable relations. With similar aims, Bajkolandia also reaches out to the wider local community, trying to analyse and answer to arising needs with new kinds of activities.



The fact that the community is relatively small makes it possible to do this through informal contacts. This openness to local needs and new ideas builds Bajkolandia's positive image in the community. This also contributes to the reputation of social economy in general.

## SUCSESSES

One success for a young cooperative like Bajkolandia is the fact that it has become an organisationally and financially stable social economy enterprise which fulfils its goal of providing jobs for the members of cooperative. It also successfully implements its core activities of providing the childcare for small children in Leżajsk, filling the niche created by the lack of such services. The members of the cooperative managed to create a well functioning enterprise and continues to strengthen their own skills and competencies. They ensured additional funding for Bajkolandia through successful fundraising, which allowed for the employment of a sixth person and workload relief for others.

## CHALLENGES

The main challenge for Bajkolandia has been problems with funding and finding an appropriate location. Searching for a place for Bajkolandia took a long time and was at first not successful. The offers from the commercial market were far too expensive for a newly established cooperative. Finally, Bajkolandia found its place thanks to support from the civil servants at the Labour Office and local authorities- in an unused building at a hospital – an old laundry facility.

Large amount of funds were also consumed to renovation the facilities. At the same time, Bajkolandia was lacking funds to promote its new initiative. To deal with these problems, the members of the Cooperative increased their fundraising efforts, as well as looking for alternative solutions. They secured donations from local companies and voluntary support from local technical school students with the renovation work. They also increased promotion by word of mouth. One constant concern of Bajkolandia is securing funds to equip classrooms, especially with toys and art materials, which in such facilities wear out very quickly and must be purchased on a regular basis. The continuous fundraising efforts have resulted in a grant from the Regional Development Agency, which secured money for this purpose.

Since Bajkolandia offers paid services, it cannot compete with the prices of public childcare facilities. This could be a challenge if/when the latter develop offers for smaller children. Therefore, Bajkolandia focus on developing niche services which are not offered by others, such as childcare on irregular and hourly basis.

## LESSONS LEARNED

The example of Bajkolandia shows that it is very important to analyse all implications related to the type of activity that the future social economy

initiative will implement. Bajkolandia was initially going to be a childcare facility; however, there are a number of regulations under Polish law that a nursery or a preschool must comply with, plus permits that this kind of facilities must have. This would be a difficult challenge for a beginning social economy initiative. Therefore, to avoid these complications, Bajkolandia was formally established as a playroom instead of as a nursery. The President of Bajkolandia Cooperative, Paulina Nowak, stresses that the key for a well functioning cooperative or any other enterprise are the people. When they are involved, dedicated, when they take responsibility and ownership of the cooperative, when they are flexible and their potential is used, their initiative has a big chance for success.

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## The Big Issue

### INTRODUCTION

Having been started over 20 years ago, The Big Issue was inspired by a similar initiative in New York. Gordon Roddick (who, together with wife Anita Roddick, started The Body Shop in 1976) met a homeless person on the streets in New York who sold him a newspaper. He was intrigued by the idea of engaging a homeless person in the business process, to help themselves rather than being the recipient of charitable donations, which was the traditional model. The basic principle is that a homeless person would use their own cash to purchase the publication, which are then sold to the public at their own profit or loss. Roddick brought this idea to England and started The Big Issue with John Bird, and it has always operated on the same basis – it's a professional magazine with content created by professionals, with advertisement based on its circulation, and it's sold exclusively to homeless people and those vulnerably housed. In other words, if a member of the public wants to get ahold of a copy of this publication, they have to go to a homeless person to buy it.



### AIM(s)

The Big Issue exists to address the problem of homelessness, by offering homeless people the opportunity to earn a legitimate income. Using the slogan "Help them to help themselves", The

Big Issue is committed to those vulnerable people who are willing and ready to make a change in their own lives. Becoming a vendor and selling magazines offers homeless people a viable alternative to begging (or crime).

Another key aim for The Big Issue is to challenge the prejudices in society about homelessness. This is accomplished by providing opportunities for positive interactions with homeless people who are selling the magazine, and through the websites of both the company and of the foundation.

### TARGET GROUP(s)

The main beneficiaries of The Big Issue are homeless people or those in danger of being homeless. In order to become a Big Issue vendor, an individual must prove that they are homeless or at risk of homelessness, which includes not having permanent housing or being in immediate danger of losing their housing.

In addition, The Big Issue is a very public operation, and its activities actively challenge stereotypes about homeless people. Because homeless people are on the streets selling magazines, members of the public have direct contact with a group of people that are usually invisible and considered "untouchable". Further, The Big Issue offers opportunities for members of the public to volunteer and get involved.

### STRUCTURE

The business started in 1991, in London, and it is a company limited by guarantee. After a couple of years of operation, successfully getting homeless people working, it became apparent to the owners that there was also a need and an opportunity to deal with the issues that either lead to or were arising as a result of being homeless. For example, homeless people might have health problems or mental health issues.

The owners saw that, as a homeless person becomes more stable, the next step is to deal with these other issues. However, the magazine was never profitable enough to fund any additional support services that might be necessary. Therefore, The Big Issue Foundation was established in 1995 and this charity organisation brings in most of its money through donations from private individuals, but also receives grants and corporate funding. The company and the charity are separate but closely connected - beneficiaries of The Big Issue Foundation are exclusively Big Issue vendors, those people who have already chosen to engage in the process of self-help. The business and the foundation work from the same building, sharing some services, and the Board of Trustees for the charity includes one member from the company. Occasionally, the business makes enough of a profit to pass on some small money to the foundation, but legally they are entirely separate entities that choose to work together for the benefit of Big Issue vendors because both organisations understand the importance of engaging a homeless person in the process of their own change. The workforce is relatively small, considering there are about 2000 active vendors that need support. There are approximately 100 employees in the business and only 30 in the charity. Volunteers are also encouraged, who can help in the office or supporting vendors on the street, with local marketing or organising fund-raising events.

## ACTIVITIES

The Big Issue produces a weekly entertainment and current affairs magazine, written and prepared by paid professionals, which is sold on the streets of almost every large town in England, Wales and Scotland. With approximately 2000 vendors across the UK, over 105,000 copies are sold every week. In order to become a vendor, a person must undergo an induction process and sign up to the code of conduct. Then they are allocated a fixed area in which to sell and issued with a

five free copies of the magazine. Once they have sold these magazines, they can purchase further copies, which they buy for £1.25 and sell for £2.50, thereby making a profit of £1.25 per copy.

The Big Issue Foundation works exclusively with Big Issue vendors, linking them with vital support and services. The organisation offers advice and referrals in four key areas: housing, health, financial independence and aspirations. With approximately 2000 active vendors at any given time, there is a high turnover – some of this is thanks to the fact that the self-help system worked and the person has moved on in their life. In 2012, The Big Issue Foundation helped over 3000 vendors, providing quite small amounts of money to a lot of people for simple but crucial things. This included dentistry or sexual health care, help getting proper identification and opening a bank account, buying a pair of shoes or tools needed to undertake a training course, or support re-establishing family networks.



## PARTNERSHIP(s)

The magazine has many commercial relationships, which come about and are developed through advertising. In addition to purchasing ad space, other companies or organisations might sponsor a supplement in the magazine.

The Big Issue has a large weekly circulation, which makes it a valuable platform and people are often willing to offer something in the expectation that they will get featured in the magazine. For example, if someone is publishing a book and they offer to donate some of the profits of the book, they might expect to get a high-profile positive review in order to help sales. The company is fortunate to be a well-recognised brand, which means people are drawn to it, but it is important to carefully consider these kinds of offers.



Further, the foundation has developed a number of partnerships, for example with companies who not only make donations but also encourage their staff to get involved as part of their CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) activities.

Especially considering how small the workforce is compared to the magazine's circulation and the number of vendors, partnerships "on the street" are extremely important. Working closely with the police, local government officers and other support agencies helps to ensure that Big Issue vendors are as safe as they can be, selling the magazine on the streets.

## CERTIFICATES

Stephen Robertson, CEO of The Big Issue Foundation, feels that "certificates are potentially useful and would be valuable if we traded in other areas. But we are unique in that we're a publishing house, with only one product, and we only sell it to homeless people." The Big Issue does have the UK's Social Enterprise mark but considers this more a badge of honour, rather than something that should be featured on their website in order to attract more sales or bring in more charitable income.

## SUCSESSES

Operating for more than two decades, The Big Issue has helped thousands and thousands of vulnerable people to take control of their lives. Despite a high turnover of vendors and given the restrictions of a relatively small staff, relationships are maintained with around 2000 homeless and vulnerably housed people across the UK at any given time. Created as a business solution to a social problem, The Big Issue has made a significant impact on the way the public view homelessness, and their eagerness to get involved.

The barriers of silence and invisibility commonly associated with homelessness have been broken, and general public have much greater contact and more positive engagement with homeless people who are trying to change their lives.

Thanks in large part to The Big Issue, street papers are now a global phenomenon and what unifies them is self-help, engaging the vulnerable person in the process of getting the product to market. While other entities are not owned or directly associated with The Big Issue, it is an internationally recognised brand and a powerful blueprint for social change which has inspired hundreds of imitations across the world. The International Network of Street Papers, founded in 1994 and based in Scotland, exists to support these other publications, supporting their development and providing a range of services.

## CHALLENGES

One of the main commercial challenges is that the magazine is sold to vendors ridiculously cheap. Traditionally, if a magazine is sold to an outlet, that outlet might make £0.10 on each copy – it would be sold to the outlet for £2.40 and sold to the public for £2.50. The Big Issue is sold to vendors at half price – a homeless person buys copies for £1.25 and sells them to the public for £2.50. In business terms, where maximising profit is the focus, this simply would not be done. However, allowing homeless people to keep half the cover price is part of the ethos of the company. Also, the magazine is sold exclusively to a group of people that the vast majority of the public hold some degree of stereotype and prejudice against. Normally, if you were trying to sell a product you wouldn't make it exclusively available from an outlet that people don't like.

Another challenge is that a lot of people simply think of The Big Issue as charity, and they think of their engagement with the homeless person as a charitable act rather than a business interaction.

There are a lot of people who just give the vendor money and don't take the magazine. But if the vendors aren't buying more copies, then the circulation drops and the value of the advertising drops. It is a big communication challenge, getting people to understand the value in the appropriate transaction.

When asked about the drop-out rate for vendors, Stephen Robertson said, "We probably meet about 85-100 people a week. In many cases they are not with us two weeks later. That could be because the process has worked. Or because they are not ready for it." Essentially, what The Big Issue offers homeless people is the chance for a face-to-face sales job. In order for the vendor to get someone to buy a paper, they have to overcome certain prejudices and stereotypes. For some vendors, they just can't engage the public. "It's not easy to stop people on the streets, to make eye contact and to sell a product, while you are yourself experiencing significant disadvantage."

## LESSONS LEARNED

The Big Issue remains fairly unique in terms of the scale of social enterprise. With approximately 2000 vendors, it is one of the biggest operations of its kind in the world. Their success is due, in part, to the fact that British law allows people to sell papers on the streets in the UK. If a person wanted to sell umbrellas, for example, they would need a street traders license, which costs 800 GBP. If all Big Issue vendors had to pay this, the entity wouldn't have even been started, because no one would be able to afford this.

When asked for advice, Stephen Robertson acknowledged that the challenges would be different in Romania or in Japan than they are in the UK. "It's important to see what's right for each different place, and to decide what is the right kind of thing for the right kind of customers in each country. There was once an ambition to have The Big Issue in Los Angeles, but there was a problem because everyone drives a car there and nobody walks on the street unless they're homeless. So maybe it's stating the obvious, but it's about looking carefully and hard at the environment and the culture that you're trying to work in." He also said that any enterprise requires hard business planning. "You really need to have done your research and your numbers. You need to understand how long you can stay alive and what you need to do to keep that going." He also pointed out that to get any business going you need start up capital, which requires an intelligent and creative look at the sources of funding, because this could come from a whole host of sources, depending what the environment is like and what the society is like.

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**Interview and correspondence with Stephen Robertson, CEO of The Big Issue Foundation**

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### INTRODUCTION

CASA was established in 2004 in the north of England. This is a family of franchised worker-owned companies that provide social care for older and disabled people, delivering a range of home care and support for independent living. With its roots in the cooperative movement, the organisation has been shaped by a belief in mutuality, participation and quality.

### AIM(s)

Rather than trying to maximise profit, CASA's main commitment is to the communities they serve. On the one hand, this means working to create a positive workplace culture, with better jobs and support for their employees' professional development. This in turn allows them to offer a high quality, flexible service for the people who rely on CASA for their care needs. With services tailored to the specific needs of individuals, the aim is to give people as much control as possible over the support they receive.

### TARGET GROUP(s)

The primary beneficiaries are the older and disabled people receiving care, who are able to live as independently as possible through the provision of home care and self directed support. Another target group is the staff. By being a good employer and treating people fairly, CASA has built up and retains a committed workforce, with every employee being supported to achieve their personal and professional best.

CASA is also committed to community and to the environment. Working in sustainable ways and using other social enterprises where possible as suppliers, they do everything to minimise environmental degradation and to ensure that social impact is always positive.

### STRUCTURE

CASA develops franchise companies where the workforce are the owners and where employees participate in the decisions that affect their working life. It was modeled on another pioneering and award winning employee-owned social enterprise in the north of England, Sunderland Home Care Associates. The organisation is governed by an Executive Board and each franchise company has at least one CASA Board member on its Board. CASA holds up to 26% of the shares for each of its franchise companies. The remainder of the shares for each franchise company are held in Employee Benefit Trusts (EBTs), which allocate shares to employees according to a Share Incentive Plan (SIP). CASA is backed by Bridges Ventures, a private investment company which aims to achieve dedicated social and/or environmental goals through its support.

### ACTIVITIES

CASA provides a variety of services to older and disabled people living in their own homes, which includes 24-hour holistic one to one support for individuals with complex needs. All of CASA's activities are focused around a commitment to keeping people as independent as possible, building services around their needs and desires. The franchise companies offer personal care such as: assistance getting up and going to bed, with bathing and using the toilet, taking medicines and help during the night. General domestic support covers tasks such as: changing bed linen, preparing meals and washing up, shopping and running errands, help with bills and paperwork, cleaning and other household tasks.

CASA franchises can also provide support for other regular carers within care homes or sheltered accommodation, or help with things like moving residence and making the transition to independent living.

They can facilitate participation in activities elsewhere and, for disabled adults, provide educational support and help into employment or self-employment. Their services also include end of life or palliative care for individuals with chronically illness.

Additionally, CASA offers a range of consultancy services to local authorities and National Health Service agencies, as well as social enterprises and voluntary sector organisations. CASA specialises in establishing, developing and nurturing employee owned social care companies and can assist with everything from business plans and securing start-up funding, to recruitment and staff induction programmes.

### **PARTNERSHIP(s)**

CASA works in close partnership with Local Authorities, National Health Service agencies, and other care commissioning organisations, in order to help them make the best use of finite resources and to get value for money. Many services are delivered through public contracts, they also provide services directly to individuals who pay privately or through individual budgets.

CASA continues to sustain a relationship with Sunderland Home Care Associates, the social enterprise upon which CASA was based. By listing one another as “sister companies”, they stay in good contact and are available for mutual support. Another important partner is Bridges Ventures, who provide capital investment for the franchises. CASA maintains close ties with all of its franchise companies and owns a minority stake in each of them.

### **CERTIFICATES**

CASA is committed to the principles of good governance as identified in the UK Corporate Governance Code. While this is not exactly a certificate, by proudly stating this, CASA sends a clear message – especially to those potentially

interested to start a franchise – that it operates according to standards of good practice in relation to board leadership and effectiveness, remuneration, accountability and relations with shareholders. All CASA franchise companies are registered with and periodically checked by the Care Quality Commission. This is an independent regulation agency that assesses whether hospitals, care homes and care services are meeting national standards.

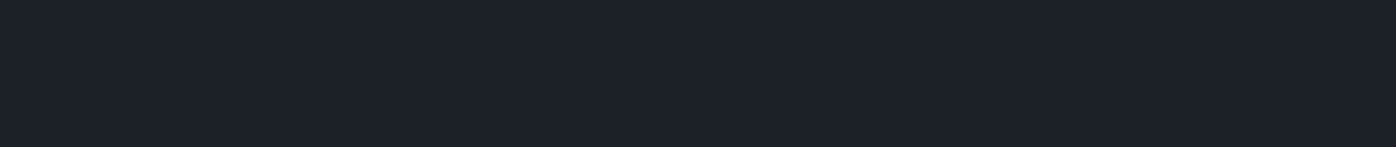
### **SUCSESSES**

The CASA group has a strong track record of providing skilled, compassionate and reliable workers. Believing that high quality care and support is all about the workforce, CASA found a way to tap into people’s natural creativity and commitment, by giving them a stake in their business. Finding that democratic methods result in a higher level of commitment to the organisation and to the quality of the services delivered, they succeeded in forging a model of ownership and management that rewards loyalty and professionalism. In robust competition with the private sector, they have managed to achieve their goal of becoming a leading provider of health and social care in England.

Further, CASA found that many people wrongly assume that residential care is necessary, even when there are options available to stay at home. For almost a decade, CASA has successfully helped to break stereotypes surrounding older and disabled people, and to assist individuals to live as independently as possible.

### **CHALLENGES**

With the levels of demand increasing, CASA is working to develop innovative services, and to offer options beyond the boundaries of traditional care. CASA is determined to look ahead to new models of provision which will achieve cost savings whilst ensuring choice, control and



dignity for individuals who use services. Further, CASA has recently invested in additional quality management in order to ensure a consistent approach to quality and outcomes across the whole group.

## **LESSONS LEARNED**

"We believe in the principle of mutuality. CASA franchise companies support each other in many different ways, including sharing resources, learning from each other and offering moral support when things are difficult. This approach helps us to achieve continuous improvement and innovation in everything we do, because we know that no matter how well we do something, there's always room for improvement. We are actively growing and developing new employee owned social enterprises, not just so that as many areas as possible can benefit from the model and way of working, but also because we know that together we're stronger."

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### INTRODUCTION

Catering Solidario is a social enterprise initiated by the Ana Bella Foundation in Spain, in 2007. The Foundation focuses on assisting women who are victims of violence. One of the main problems faced by the victims of gender-based violence is a lack of economic independence. Therefore, providing them with paid jobs attends to one of their most fundamental needs. This is why the Ana Bella Foundation established Catering Solidario, an initiative that offers quality catering services adjusted to the needs of the clients, which also promotes socially committed and environmentally friendly products. At the same time, it provides jobs for women who have experienced violence, giving them a chance for a new beginning after difficult experiences.

The Ana Bella Foundation and Catering Solidario was established by a woman who experienced violence herself. After 11 years of being abused by her husband, Ana Bella Estévez managed to escape, change her life and raise a family of four children. In the process of separation, experiencing various programs supporting women in her situation, and through interactions with other women in similar situations, she saw the great potential of women who overcame similar dreadful life situations and that this should be used to help other victims of violence. In order to do so, she established the Ana Bella Foundation and has continued by developing subsequent projects.

### AIM(s)

Catering Solidario was created to help abused women to become active on the labour market. This direct support in the form of a job and a friendly work place also fulfills an indirect aim of empowering women who experienced violence by helping them to (re)gain independence and stability. These practical and therapeutic goals are the essence of Catering Solidario. It is a project set up to provide employment and help women who

have survived domestic violence to overcome their experiences.

### TARGET GROUP(s)

The activities of the Ana Bella Foundation, including Catering Solidario, are addressed to women who suffered from domestic violence. Despite the fact that this group shares the experience of violence, it is not homogenous and there are a number of other problems that concern the employees and beneficiaries of Catering Solidario. Many of these women are mothers, some live in poverty, some are immigrants. The Ana Bella Foundation's work, through Catering Solidario, is a way to support all of these groups. Between 2007 and 2011, Catering Solidario provided jobs to 120 women.

### STRUCTURE

Catering Solidario is the social economy initiative of a non-profit organisation – The Ana Bella Foundation. It was established as a company with limited liability. The Foundation manages the fundraising to support the activities of Catering Solidario. It also takes care of promotion activities. The daily functioning and decision making is the responsibility of the manager of Catering Solidario.

### ACTIVITIES

The activities of Catering Solidario involve providing catering services, in particular offering breakfast and lunch snacks based on fair trade and organic products. These services are offered to companies and institutions, in particular as "coffee breaks" during events organised by the clients. Catering Solidario offers Fair Trade and ecological products and their catering services are available in a number of Spanish provinces including Seville, Malaga, Huelva, Cadiz and Badajoz.

Catering Solidario engages in promoting socially responsible products and businesses involved in the Fair Trade movement. In this way, it is contributing to more balanced trading relations, fair prices for producers, ending exploitative labour, environmental protection and responsible consumption.

The team of Catering Solidario is composed of women trained in catering preparation and service as well as in fair and environmentally friendly trade. All of them also receive professional counseling. The fact that they are survivors of domestic violence is made known to the clients and beneficiaries of the services. Women working at Catering Solidario wear t-shirts with messages about combating violence. In this way, they contribute to raising awareness about the problem and the solutions aimed at helping women in their situation. Their work is subsidised by the Andalusian Employment Service.

#### **PARTNERSHIP(S)**

The main partner of Catering Solidario is The Ana Bella Foundation, its founder. Apart from the support in fundraising and promotion, the Ana Bella Foundation refers women survivors of violence who look for jobs to Catering Solidario. Catering Solidario starts to develop the partnerships of its own, especially by building the relations with the clients and companies supporting its work, such as Danone or Ford.

#### **CERTIFICATES**

Catering Solidario is not certified itself, however it uses certified products, such as coffee or tea certified with the Fair Trade mark. This mark is awarded by the international Fairtrade Labeling Organization (FLO) to local producers, mostly in developing countries, who grow and manufacture their products in compliance with environmental and labour rights standards and who support local communities.

#### **SUCSESSES**

Catering Solidario is a well-functioning entity with regards to its economic and social aspects. It fulfills its aims of changing the lives of women survivors of violence and their families. Women empowered by the experience of work at Catering Solidario also manage to find other jobs.

At the same time, the enterprise implements a solid business strategy with the prospect of growing. In 2011, it was awarded as one of the ten most promising social enterprises in Spain by the Momentum Project, which promotes social economy in Spain.

#### **CHALLENGES**

Catering Solidario aims to expand its activities, widen the group of clients and provide more job opportunities for women experiencing violence. This, however, poses new challenges such as developing the infrastructure. This would require increasing the working space, acquiring an industrial kitchen and investing in transportation support. In addition, it would require widening the team of Catering Solidario, providing training to the newcomers as well as arranging additional work for the growing enterprise.

These challenges are related to another one – funding. The common challenge for social enterprises is shared also by Catering Solidario. It is not yet a fully financially sustainable project and cuts in public support caused by the economic crisis have also impacted on its situation. Still, as an important employer of women survivors of violence, Catering Solidario can count on the support of the Ana Bella Foundation, which looks for interested donors. Significant support was also provided by the Momentum Project in the form of management training and a €50,000 award.

## LESSONS LEARNED

The main lesson learned by Ana Bella, her Foundation and projects like Catering Solidario is the fact that women who have experienced violence and then managed to start a new life are the best people to help other women in similar situations. Their example gives hope and motivation to other women. Sharing their experience and advice is the most useful and effective in supporting women who have experienced violence. The activities of Catering Solidario, empowering women by enabling them to have economic independence and security, strengthens this with a multiplying effect. This approach has proved to be effective and will be continued by spreading the work of the enterprise.

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### INTRODUCTION

Cosmic is an Information Technology company, based in the South West of England and operating according to their core values: ethical, inspirational, friendly, supportive and innovative. Having started in 1996, Cosmic was one of the first businesses in the UK to be awarded the Social Enterprise Mark. In addition to providing quality services to their commercial clients, Cosmic believes that social enterprise is the future for business and they work to share their experiences with others.



### AIM(s)

On top of delivering business services, Cosmic has a mission to reduce the digital divide and to help make the benefits of living in a digital world available to everyone. Their key objective is to improve digital inclusion – providing IT support for people and organisations who need it the most. Further, they are committed to supporting other social enterprises by providing support and training.

### TARGET GROUP(s)

Located in a rural area, Cosmic's main beneficiaries are people who, for a range of

reasons, are disadvantaged in their use of digital technologies. For example, this could be someone with low income living in a remote village, with barriers to accessing good hardware, fast internet service and lacking the skills to use the equipment. Cosmic also focus their support on organisations – charities and other social enterprises – helping them to improve the way they work and their level of impact.

### STRUCTURE

Describing themselves as an ethical business, Cosmic utilises a model that does not involve shareholders or paying dividends from profits. With a steady staff of 10 people, they also have an annually elected Board of Directors, which includes staff and non-staff. The Board takes care of strategic planning, monitoring and evaluation the work and finances, as well as overseeing policy and business development. They also have a wide stakeholder focus, a company membership and strong strategic partners which help to deliver social impact and reinvest their profits and resources where they will make the most difference.



## ACTIVITIES

Cosmic's activities include making websites and providing technical support, as well as training and consultancy. They deliver these services to individuals, businesses, community organisations, governmental agencies and other social enterprises. Their website development and IT support provides assistance with small or large sites, including e-commerce options and content management systems (which allow users to update their own website). With regards to training and consultancy, they provide services for all levels and on a range of topics, from the basics of computing to advanced social media and search engine optimisation. In addition to devising and delivering workshops and large-scale projects specifically focused on IT issues, Cosmic has also undertaken leadership development programmes. In association with the University of Plymouth, between 2009 – 2011 Cosmic delivered the UK's only nationally accredited course for leaders in social enterprise, known as the "Pioneer Programme".

## PARTNERSHIP(s)

Partnerships are very important for Cosmic. They have always worked closely with key suppliers in the IT industry, which allows them to offering substantial discounts and favourable terms for charities in the UK. Plus, many of their projects are the result of successful partnerships – with local government offices, with other businesses who provide specialist support services, or with other social enterprises. Perhaps the most complicated partnership resulted through the development of the accredited course for social enterprise leaders. Run in association with the local University, it was developed as part of a project funded by the European Social Fund, in partnership with the Council of Ethnic Minority Voluntary Organisations, RISE (Regional Infrastructure for Social Enterprise) and Social Enterprise Works, with additional support from an

organization in Finland, Syfo. Cosmic feel strongly that partnerships enable them to deliver their work more effectively and in affordable ways. Further, working in partnership also means they are able to target individuals and organisations more accurately, keeping their needs in mind. For example, working with organisations whose focus might be specifically on support for disadvantaged or disabled people has helped to develop strong relationships and to understand the approaches which work well.



## CERTIFICATES

In addition to being among the first to have the UK's Social Enterprise Mark when it was launched in early 2010, Cosmic's Chief Executive, Julie Hawker, is a Social Enterprise Mark Ambassador and works for wider recognition of this certificate. "Trading for people and planet" is the slogan and the mark guarantees that the business is directed by the needs of society and the environment, first and foremost, rather than being motivated by creating profits for shareholders. Cosmic has also been accredited by Investors in People, which is the UK's leading people management standard and demonstrates a commitment to people and to continuous improvement. Further, they are a validated member of Beacon, which is a business network for companies that not only demonstrate outstanding achievement but are also eager to share their knowledge and tactics.



## SUCCESSSES

Over the years, Cosmic has had a great impact on digital inclusion in the area. Developing and delivering funded projects and services across the south west region of England, they have provided tens of thousands of people with support, skills and advice which has impacted on their lives, careers and communities.

The "Orbit" Space Shuttle was an innovative mobile project, which ran for a number of years and operated from a bespoke training trailer that travelled to different locations. Working in rurally isolated areas, this provided people with access to digital technologies and skills, and encouraged organisations in the local communities to embrace digital learning in their plans.

Cosmic is involved in two long-term projects, cooperating with the local government to stimulate the use of fast and reliable broadband in this digitally deprived countryside.

Through seminars, workshops and one-to-one assistance, Cosmic is increasing connectivity and productivity in this geographically isolated area.

Also very popular has been their Digital Mentor project, which has been running since 2009 and provides support, training and advice for digitally excluded individuals, businesses and organisations. This is a service that people pay for, but the costs are kept low because it is subsidised by other commercial work.

Essentially, because Cosmic is running a commercially successful business, they are able to use the profits towards fulfilling their additional social objectives.

Further Cosmic has also been effectively contributing towards the growth of social enterprise with their leadership programmes. In addition to their accredited course for social enterprise leaders - which had their first graduates

in September 2011 - they also run occasional events that include networking, workshops and lectures for those involved in community-interested companies. In 2010, Cosmic was named as an Impact leader in the RBS SE100 index.



## CHALLENGES

At Cosmic, they feel that the challenges for them are the same as for anyone trying to make a small business work effectively, but with an additional focus on social impact. Communication - with staff, Board members and stakeholders - is something they are always reviewing and trying to improve. Also, change management is difficult when there is a focus on people as the primary objective. Having started over 15 years ago, this includes staff changes, as well as project review and impact assessment.

## LESSONS LEARNED

Chief Executive Julie Hawker said that one of the skills she's developed most is learning to prioritise things and to focus on issues that really deserve attention. She felt it was important for her to have a clear sense of leadership, as opposed to just operational management.

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Correspondence interview with Julie Hawker,  
Chief Executive at Cosmic

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The association "DUMBRĂVIȚA for People" is a social enterprise established in 2012 in Brașov County in Romania, within the project "RURES. Rural Space and Social Economy". This project, implemented during the 2010-2013 period by the Soros Foundation Romania, together with the Pestalozzi Foundation and the Civitas Foundation, facilitated the establishment of 25 social enterprises in villages from 8 counties in Romania.

The association supports the Roma community in the village Dumbrăvița, whose main source of income is weaving and selling baskets.

While this is a new social enterprise, it is relevant to include this example as a way to illustrate the good practice that is being developed in Romania thanks to the considerable effort being made to support social economy.

### **AIM(s)**

The association "DUMBRĂVIȚA for People" aims to contribute to raising the living standards of the community, making use of local craft, basket weaving, and turning it into a steady source of income for Roma weavers.

The association combines the need for labour market inclusion of Roma community members with the need to preserve the tradition of weaving baskets.

### **TARGET GROUP(s)**

"DUMBRĂVIȚA for people" works for and with Roma craft weavers from the village of Dumbrăvița. These craftspeople are seasonal workers, retirees, with large families, and mostly living on minimum wage.

### **STRUCTURE**

The social enterprise activities are co-ordinated by a manager. Also, the association has a person in charge of promoting and selling the products. One person, the most experienced, is permanently employed, while five others are employed with contracts depending on order size.





## ACTIVITIES

Like any other social enterprise, "DUMBRĂVIȚA for people" has economic activity, which comes under craft production, and also a social mission, to promote the inclusion of Roma people in the labour market and preserve local traditional crafts. The association operates with its main activity of producing woven goods (small baskets, slingshots, hazel baskets from willow twigs) and, at the same time, the association's members undertake activities to promote and sell the products. In addition, association members participate in fairs and festivals of traditional crafts.

## SUCSESSES

The first success of the enterprise came shortly after its founding and consisted of a first significant order (217 woven baskets), which involved the work of seven craftspeople in the community. The buyer was a company from Cluj, who learned on Facebook about this social enterprise from Brasov and wanted to offer unique Christmas gifts to its employees.

First, it was a success to mobilise the group to work together to fulfil the order (up until that point, the Roma craftsmen weavers had been working individually). Further, the size of the order ensured a reasonable remuneration for each craftsman.

## CHALLENGES

The obstacles for this enterprise are typical for any business at its beginning. Given that none of the association members had previous entrepreneurial experience, the difficulties are even greater. These include: identifying markets and potential clients, creating a brand, market positioning and improving product quality.

Given that the social enterprise is operating in a rural area, an important challenge is how to access the urban areas market. In addition,

maintaining the group members' cohesion, trust and motivation to work in an organised manner is another challenge for this social start-up.



## LESSONS LEARNED

"Usually, during winters the village craftspeople lack orders. However, since the association formed and the project seeks and brings customers, the people are working constantly and have a reliable source of income." This is the first lesson underlined by Istvan Szabo, the expert who provided advice to the Dumbrăvița group.

In addition, "people do not have to go miles and miles to sell their products, so the time saved this way can be spent with family, invested in children's education", added Julian Ifrim, expert in social economy of Soros Foundation Romania.

The first order was essential for the newly established social enterprise. It validated the coordinated way of working that was needed to fulfil the contract. "Our collaboration was marked by a responsible assumption of risks. If we, as recipients, had to accept a slight delay in delivery, then the Association 'DUMBRĂVIȚA for people' had the courage to execute a large first order, without having received an advance since the necessary steps to set up the association's legal entity weren't taken in due time.

It's encouraging that, despite the risk of a first-time collaboration with adverse consequences in the event of failure to meet commitments from the other side, each of us trusted the other's word. We are happy that our request has managed to be a little push towards more efficient organisation of the association and also proved that crafts are still sought and appreciated." declared DG, representative of the Cluj company that placed the order.



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## **EKON – Association of Disabled people for the Environment**

### **INTRODUCTION**

EKON – Association of Disabled people for the Environment – was established in 2003 as an answer to the need of creating jobs for disabled. Since finding employment on the “open” labour market proved to be difficult for this group, the initiators decided to establish a new entity and create jobs themselves. They discovered their niche: environmentally friendly waste management. At that time Poland, as a new EU member, needed to implement ecological waste management but there weren't enough companies that dealt with this issue. There was a gap in the market, and EKON used this opportunity. Currently, the association has 16 branches in 4 regions of Poland.

### **AIM(s)**

EKON's aim is to provide “green work places” for people with disabilities who are in danger of social exclusion. The association is focused on the social and occupational activation of disabled, in particular people with intellectual disabilities and mental illnesses. At the same time EKON aims to raise the ecological awareness in Polish society – not only of the communities where they operate but also public institutions and companies that the association cooperate with. This is being enhanced with education activities, such as workshops and publications.

### **TARGET GROUP(s)**

The main beneficiary group of EKON are disabled, in particular people with intellectual disabilities or mental illnesses. EKON works to provide them with job opportunities as well as facilitate their social integration through a kind of work therapy and through contact with people. Currently EKON has over 1300 employees, 90% of them are disabled, mainly people with intellectual disabilities and mental illnesses. EKON's target group is also its clientele, especially the community housing

associations and companies from which the association collects waste. Currently, in Warsaw alone, EKON receives waste from about 60,000 apartments, which means that about 180,000 inhabitants of Warsaw are EKON's clients.

### **STRUCTURE**

EKON's work started with the establishment of the Disabled for the Environment EKON Association in 2003. At that time, the best places to employing disabled workers were sheltered workshops, who were offered incentives in the form of subsidies for the salaries of the disabled people working there. These specific organisations received twice as much compensation as other actors on the open labour market, including associations. Therefore, EKON Association initiated cooperation with two sheltered workshops: ABA-service sp. z o.o. and TJ sp. z o.o. These three entities began joint activities in January 2004, working for the protection of the environment, with EKON Association as the leader.

Due to a change in Polish regulations, it became no longer possible for limited liability companies to have non-profit status, and this affected the partners of EKON Association. Therefore, at the beginning of 2008, EKON Association took over all of the shares in TJ sp. z o.o., and PROXIMUS Foundation took over 100% all of the shares in ABA-service z o.o. In this way, all of the partners are able to continue operating together under the Social Enterprise act, according to a non-profit formula which means that their profits are allocated exclusively for statutory activity. In EKON's case, this means that they allocate their profits to activities aimed at solving problems for disabled people, with a special consideration for those with mental illnesses, as well as for activities related to environment protection. EKON Association is governed by a Board and managed on a daily basis by the President of the Board.

## ACTIVITIES

The main activity of EKON is collecting and sorting waste received directly from households, institutions and companies. Sorted and compressed, the waste is provided to companies that use this material for recycling. How does it work exactly? The companies, institutions or habitants of the neighborhoods EKON operates in receive ecologically-sourced collection bags which they use to store their recyclable waste. Then the bags are collected regularly at an agreed time and the collected waste is transported to EKON's sorting plant. There, the waste is segregated again, compressed and prepared for shipping to the recycling company. EKON shares their experience through a training and support project called "Ekonsystem" which encourages the implementation of their model of social enterprise in other regions of Poland.

As a part of its education activities, employees of EKON distribute a toolkit about how to segregate the recyclable waste collected by the association. EKON implements projects together with companies which involve ecological awareness raising of the employees. These projects also contribute to the integration of disabled people and to overcoming stereotypes about intellectually disabilities by initiating cooperation between a companies' employees and the beneficiaries of EKON.

Finally, EKON acts as an employment agency, specialised in finding jobs for disabled, especially people with intellectual disabilities and with mental illnesses. EKON promotes employment of this group through joint projects with companies, awareness-raising activities as well as through their involvement organising Job Fairs.

## PARTNERSHIP(s)

EKON cooperates with a number of partners. An important one is Warsaw Fund for Environment

Protection and Water Management, which supported EKON with funds for specialised equipment. EKON also cooperates with the Institute of Psychiatry and Neurology, thanks to which the patients with mental illnesses can find out about EKON and find a job.

EKON cooperates with a number of large companies (i.e. Unilever, Carrefour), providing ecological waste management as well as raising awareness and strengthening the sensitivity of employees to environmental and social inclusion issues.

## CERTIFICATES

EKON has a Quality Management System certificate PN-EN ISO 9001:2001 which strengthens the efforts of the enterprise to develop and provide high quality services. They were also granted two certificates by the Polish Ministry of Economy and Labour<sup>1</sup> which permit EKON to act as an employment agency: the Certificate of Employment Agencies (Registration No 715/1a) allows them to be a placement agent in the territory of the Polish Republic, together with a Certificate for employment agencies to act as a personal counseling agency (reg. no 715/2).

## SUCSESSES

EKON was the first social economy initiative in Poland with such a strong commitment to the work on environmental protection and raising ecological awareness. At the same time, it is effectively supporting disabled and especially intellectually disabled persons. The main achievement of EKON is their successful implementation of social goals through prospering economic activities, which is the key feature of social economy.

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<sup>1</sup> Currently Ministry of Economy and Ministry of Labour

Thanks to prior market analysis, EKON managed to fill a gap in the market by supplying services of collecting and sorting recyclable waste. EKON is competitive with the commercial companies working in the same sector. In Warsaw alone, EKON receives waste from 60,000 apartments, which constitutes 31% of segregated waste in the capital of Poland. The example of EKON proves that a social economy initiative can develop into a successful business.

Thanks to a high level of awareness about the problems of the target group, EKON managed to successfully answer its needs and ensure the integration into the labour market of a large group of disabled, especially intellectually disabled and those with mental illnesses. EKON's innovative activities contributed significantly to breaking stereotypes about mentally ill and disabled, by creating job opportunities and enabling their integration in local communities. Jobs provided by EKON are also a form of therapy through work and contact with people, as opposed to functioning within closed facilities.

## CHALLENGES

EKON has also faced a number of challenges. Some of them were technical, related to securing funds for the activities and the property where the sorting plant is located. This uncertainty was problematic in the context of planning any further development for EKON.. Other challenges involved difficulties cooperating with public institutions and problematic bureaucracy, with frequent inspections and delays in the transfers of benefits for disabled employees. All this has been paralysing the work of EKON and has constituted serious obstacles to its development.

Many of these and other challenges to the development of social economy initiatives like EKON result from a low level of awareness about such a modern form of social integration and a lack of understanding among civil servants,

at Labour Offices and Social Welfare Centers. Instead of a supportive attitude, social economy enterprises often encounter a lack of trust and are faced with a controlling approach. Finally, the city's own management service treated EKON as a competitor, which was another obstacle the enterprise had to deal with. In 2013, EKON had to face another problem caused by changes in the law regulating waste management in Poland. As of August 2013, the companies receiving and processing waste are to be commissioned by the local authorities, rather than the citizens themselves. They will be chosen through tenders and will be expected to provide complex service on a larger scale. This is a challenge for EKON, since the association only manages part of the waste, that which can be recycled and it cannot provide comprehensive service. It is also too small to be able to compete in tenders. In order to overcome this challenge, the association has tried to build relations with larger companies in order to become their subcontractors and in this way continue its work.

## LESSONS LEARNED

This initiative has proved that EKON's approach to the integration of disabled people through teamwork on ecological waste management integrating in everyday life of their city is an effective one. The interest in this kind of initiative is growing, both among disabled as well as possible clients of EKON.

At the beginning, the leaders of EKON planned to employ up to 100 people, but the increasing interest from disabled people led to the development of the initiative on a much larger scale. EKON's experience also proves that it is crucial for the development of a successful business to clearly identify the need it answers to. It is even better if the entrepreneurs find a niche in the market which they can fill with their services, as it happened with EKON.

When such an opportunity is identified, it is important to assess the situation, plan the strategy, find partners, secure initial funds and start your initiative.

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### INTRODUCTION

Emma Hostel opened in January 2011, in Warsaw. It is an initiative of the social cooperative "Warszawa". Its members decided to base their business on their interests and core values – the spirit of non-hierarchical cooperative decision making and responsibility sharing, as well as environmentally friendly lifestyle, sustainable development and fair trade. They opened a hostel where the guests sleep in beds made of ecologically-sourced wood, eat vegan breakfasts with fair trade coffee and can discuss the cooperative movement or join human rights events. Emma was the first such hostel in Warsaw. As a part of the preparation for its opening, in order to make sure their business idea would have a chance to pay off, the initiators conducted research about the competition in Warsaw. They analysed the number of hostels, their price policies and other specifics, as well as looking at the need for cheaper accommodation in Warsaw. They came to the conclusion that there is definitely space for another hostel in Warsaw especially one with a distinctive profile. They called their Hostel "Emma" in tribute to Emma Goldman, the anarchist and feminist who lived in the 19th/20th century.

### AIM(s)

The aims of Emma Hostel are to promote environmentally friendly lifestyle and sustainable travel, in addition to local and fair trade products, and the cooperative movement. Another goal for Emma hostel was the occupational activation of unemployed people in danger of social exclusion.

### TARGET GROUP(s)

The first target group were unemployed members of the Cooperative "Warszawa" the founders of Emma Hostel. Other target groups are travellers, activists, NGO workers as well as other "clients" of Emma Hostel... and finally – the local community where Emma is active.



### STRUCTURE

Emma Hostel is the initiative of the social cooperative "Warszawa" following the Polish law on cooperatives. It was established by five members, among them three were unemployed. Polish cooperative law allows that members of a social cooperatives may also include people who are not members of vulnerable group, as long as they constitute less than 50% of the membership.

Currently all five members of the Cooperative are employed at Emma Hostel, with steady work contracts. They share the tasks at the hostel, as well as responsibility for its functioning. In line with Polish law, they have elected a president of the Cooperative who represents it legally, but their structure is non-hierarchical and decision making is based on consensus.

### ACTIVITIES

Running a hostel in the centre of Warsaw is the main activity of "Warszawa" Cooperative. Emma Hostel provides accommodation for 43 guests in 11 rooms located on 2 floors of a historic building on Wilcza Street in Warsaw. Emma Hostel stresses its ecological profile at every step. The furniture at Emma is either reused or made from other materials, used in an innovative way. For example,

iron bars from a fence were used to make bed frames, which were then covered with ecological varnish. All of the taps in the hostel have water flow restrictors which reduce the usage of water up to 50%. There are also LED or energy saving light bulbs and movement sensors to regulate the lighting. The Hostel uses equipment that reduces the usage of water and electricity, as well as biodegradable cleaning products. Emma also offers ecological means of transport by renting out bikes.

Apart from the hostel services, Emma undertakes awareness raising and supporting activities aimed at promoting the cooperative spirit of entrepreneurship, as well as providing assistance for people who are interested to be involved in social cooperative initiatives. Emma also organises workshops and study visits, with regular participants who are representatives of public institutions such as labour offices or social aid centers, as well as from centers for the support of social economy. These are usually paid services, but it also happens that Emma's employees support individuals for free, by assisting with the preparation of documentation needed to register a cooperative or by providing simple support such as letting someone use their office equipment. Emma is also involved in a number of social and environmental activities. The hostel provides a place for open meetings or workshops about environmental issues, human rights, eco-design, vegan cooking or other events like dinners prepared by refugees.

## **MARKETING**

Like every economic initiative, Emma Hostel needs to promote itself in order to gain new clients. What kind of marketing might be applied by this social economy initiative? It started with spreading the word among friends, and friends of friends. Many of the guests have come to Emma because the hostel was recommended to them.

Another method is to use communication tools: with a blog, through their own and other websites, and social media profiles. All information is posted in Polish and English.

Emma cooperates with three online booking services, which publish information about available accommodation options all over the world. These services charge a commission of 10-15% but still it pays off as many travelers use these internet sites.

Finally Emma prepares occasional offers with attractive prices during festivals, demonstrations and other social events taking place in Warsaw. The hostel also offers reductions of 20% for employees and volunteers of NGOs, for members of social cooperatives and trade unions, and 10% for students or 30% for seniors and social activists.

## **PARTNERSHIP(s)**

Working in partnerships is an important idea for Emma's owners and they wanted to put it in practice. It was not always easy. Their attempts to establish regular cooperation with the city hall and labour offices in Warsaw have, unfortunately, failed. The most successful is cooperation with other cooperatives and non-governmental organisations. Emma does its shopping together with members of the Warsaw Food Cooperative, who buy products such as vegetables and fruits directly from ecological farmers.

The fair trade products used at Emma Hostel are supplied by Falanster Association or Mokotów Cooperative.

Emma also supports another cooperative – Mom's Cooperative by selling its handicraft products at the hostel. A number of NGOs are also regular clients of Emma, hosting their events and accommodating their guests in the hostel. Emma also cooperates with some Warsaw city guides who organise tours for the hostel's guests.

## CERTIFICATES

Emma Hostel has been granted the recently established certificate Social Economy Enterprise Mark - [eS] Mark. This is a quality certificate awarded to social economy enterprises that meet strict social and economic criteria. The awarded enterprises are reliable business partners, who also carry out important social goals.

Emma also holds the certificate DISC-FREE – A place free from discrimination. This was awarded to the hostel by the Pro Humanum Foundation after Emma took part in a project aimed at counteracting discrimination based on nationality, gender, sexual orientation, religion, age or disability in the hotel, gastronomic and entertainment services. The project was implemented in cooperation with the City of Warsaw.

In addition, Emma uses certified products such as fair trade tea or coffee, plus vegetables, fruits and other products supplied by certified ecological farms.

## SUCSESSES

The main achievement of this initiative is that Emma Hostel has become an economically sustainable social economy enterprise which successfully implements its mission and spreads its ideas. The hostel provides employment for five members of 'Warszawa' Cooperative who are the owners of Emma. Their good financial results has allowed them to invest in further development for the initiative.

Emma Hostel becomes more and more recognisable among both tourists and inhabitants of Warsaw. It is also widely recommended. Emma has managed to establish its own 'brand' as an ecological hostel and a place friendly to social initiatives. Some of its guests choose Emma precisely because of this. Others have the chance

to be 'infected' by the ideas of environmentally friendly and socially sustainable lifestyles, and about the cooperative movement.

## CHALLENGES

The members of "Warszawa" cooperative listed a number of different kinds of challenges that they came across in the process of establishing Emma Hostel. These range from technical and financial problems with finding a place to complicated administration work, to problems with applying their personal beliefs and ideas in the functioning of a legal and economic entity.

Bureaucracy, fulfilling the legal requirements and dealing with the administrative work is a challenge for many of those who try to establish an organisation or company. This was also the case for Emma's owners. Particularly problematic were the lengthy procedures, inspections, the language of legal documents and the resistant attitude of public institutions which were not used to dealing with a new type of entity such as a cooperative.

It was important for Emma's owners to apply their ideas of non-hierarchical relations while developing their social economy initiative. The legal requirements were not making this easy. They had to appoint a president of the Cooperative who would be a legal representative. Still, they decided to share the responsibility. At the beginning, they also tried to share their tasks and take turns with implementing different activities. This proved to be ineffective and caused a number of conflicts. With time, after they were able to each try out the different kinds of work, and they were able to identify their interests and develop their skills in order to allocate tasks based on this. They also learned that some tasks, such as accountancy, must be performed by external professionals.

## LESSONS LEARNED

The experience of the members of "Warszawa" Cooperative showed that it is very useful to take part in different training and support programmes for future social entrepreneurs, provided by different organisations or institutions. This was a way to learn about complicated administration requirements (such as legal, sanitation and tax regulations) and how to deal with them. They were able to develop their skills in things like planning business activities or organising the work of the members of the initiative. Not all of the trainings offered were high quality, but it was always an occasion to meet with other people who were going through the same process and to share experiences as well as useful contacts and tips.

When you start any initiative (including a social economy enterprise), conducting research about the sector you want to work in is a must. It is important to analyse the market reality you will be functioning in, to check whether there is a space for your initiative and to identify what specialisation could make it more successful. Sometimes, it might be worth consulting specialists in market analysis.

Emma's owners also stress the importance of the relations between the Cooperative members. It is important to define the style and rules of cooperation, especially in the case where the people involved had not cooperated with each other before. "This issue is often marginalised by social entrepreneurs, but in fact it's crucial. You cannot allow for it! The rules should be very detailed. It's best to write them down and ask everyone to sign the document. This can help

to avoid misunderstandings and conflicts in the future," said the members of "Warszawa" Cooperative.

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### INTRODUCTION

Glass World Cooperative was established in 2009 by seven former employees of a bankrupt factory that was producing Christmas tree ornaments. They decided to continue this production in a new form – as a social cooperative. Since the Christmas ornaments had been manufactured in the town of Milicz since 1951 and had become the pride of the region, the local authorities supported the new initiative, which aimed to continue the tradition. In just six months, the cooperative managed to buy equipment from the bankrupt factory, adapt a new location provided by the local authorities, deal with administrative issues, organise working practices and start production early enough to be ready for Christmas. The first ornament was manufactured by Glass World in September 2009.

### AIM(s)

Preserving the tradition of Christmas ornament manufacturing is one of the aims of Glass World. However, the main idea behind creating the cooperative was to provide jobs for the qualified former employees of the factory in Milicz, for whom there were not many job opportunities in the region.

### TARGET GROUP(s)

The former employees of the bankrupt producer of Christmas tree ornaments were and still are the main target group. The cooperative was established by six women and one man who lost their jobs. Glass World provides all of them with work contracts including all social benefits. The cooperative strives to expand and to be able to employ more of their former co-workers with certain rare skills needed to manufacture the glass Christmas ornaments.

### STRUCTURE

Glass World is a social cooperative. All of its seven members are also the employees involved in manufacturing the ornaments. Four of them are decorators and three work as glass blowers. Apart from performing their main tasks, such as blowing and painting baubles, they also share other responsibilities i.e. packing and operating the cash register. All of them also are involved in guiding tours for people visiting the cooperative to find out how the ornaments are made. During the Christmas period, when the cooperative receives a large number of visitors, additional staff are employed on a temporary basis to make sure that production is continued without delays.

Glass World is governed by a three-person Board, chosen by members of the cooperative. Still, the strategic decisions are taken collectively by all members of the cooperative. On a daily basis, the cooperative is managed by the President and Vice President, who are also members of the staff. The President also takes care of the majority of the administrative work, including dealing with human resources, finances as well as relations with clients and sales management. In addition, the cooperative employs a part-time accountant. All the members of the cooperative are employed on permanent work contracts, which is untypical for Polish social enterprises. This kind of employment not only gives them stability, social benefits and labour rights but also motivates them to be engaged in the development of the cooperative and to take responsibility for its future.

### ACTIVITIES

The cooperative focuses on two types of activities. Its core work is the production of Christmas tree ornaments and, after noticing that observing the production process could be an attraction, the cooperative started organising tour visits during which visitors get acquainted with how these Christmas ornaments are made.



All the Christmas tree ornaments from Glass World are handmade. The cooperative offers Christmas baubles in over 200 shapes and with a few thousand decoration patterns. These include traditional and more avant-garde designs, simple and very complicated decorations. Sometimes, the cooperative has special individual orders and produces ornaments based on the client's design. Production takes place throughout the year, with an intensive period starting in March. The ornaments are stored in a warehouse, with samples of Glass World products on display and available for sale in the decorating room where the final decorations are added. This kind of shop appeals to individual clients who enjoy buying ornaments and seeing how they are produced.

The major percentage of sales are from individual clients, however the cooperative also takes orders from companies for ornaments with their logo, which are used for promotion purposes. Other customers use Glass World ornaments as components of their own products, for example in the manufacture of Christmas wreaths. The majority of clients are based in Poland, but the Glass World also implements orders from abroad.

Guided tours around the Glass World are an additional yet significant activity of the cooperative. The main visitors are groups of students. During the period before Christmas, Glass World receives around 150 visits from schools in the region. The visitors have a chance to observe each stages of production for the Christmas tree ornaments. They can also try it themselves during a bauble painting workshops. Both visits and workshops are paid, and generate income for the cooperative. Instead of a ticket each visitors receives a bauble.

### **PARTNERSHIP(s)**

Glass World is the result of partnerships between members of the cooperative, local authorities and local foundations. The local authorities and institutions supported the creation of the

cooperative by providing it with a space for its activities and legal support for the initial administration work. The members of the cooperative also received the support available to unemployed people establishing a social economy initiative in the form of reduced social contribution payments. It was a good investment, which paid off since Glass World is the pride of the region and contributes to its promotion through its products and by attracting a number of visitors.

Another important partnership has been built between Glass World and the Barycz Valley Foundation. This resulted in support for Glass World in developing the social economy initiative, especially with the promotion of its activities. The members of the cooperative participated in training and took part in study visits. Additionally, they received support developing promotion materials, including the website, and establishing contacts with local schools to encourage them to organise visits to the cooperative. Now, Glass World upholds the work of the Foundation by continuing to promote the region and by furthering the development of the social economy sector, which includes receiving study visits from other social entrepreneurs.

### **MARKETING**

Promotion of Glass World's products has been a challenge because of the legacy of the cooperative's predecessor that went bankrupt. The new entity had to deal with the bad reputation and to attract new clients.

First of all, it changed the profile of production to handmade ornaments, manufactured in a traditional way, with a focus on individual clients, collectors and hobbyists. Glass World also invested in the quality of its products. This new profile requires new type of relations with clients. Therefore, the cooperative opened up to the public, providing an opportunity to visit the production site and observe the whole process.



Glass World implements individual specific orders based on the clients' designs. The spirit of the cooperative, its openness, family-like atmosphere and individual relations are some of the reasons clients want to buy its products. This also helps to increase word of mouth marketing.

The products are promoted at a number of regional events and the cooperative particularly takes advantage of the seasonal character of its activities. The Christmas period is a time of increased media interest and an intensive visiting schedule. All of this significantly contributes to the promotion of Glass World's Christmas ornaments.

### **CERTIFICATES**

At the beginning, Glass World's products were marked as "Recommended by Barycz Valley", which was granted by the Barycz Valley Foundation. This certification was developed and used for the promotion of local products. Later, Glass World resigned from using this mark, because it became very much associated with the food industry and did not have significant impact on sales, comparing to other marketing tools used by the cooperative.

### **SUCCESSSES**

While establishing Glass World, the members of the cooperative hoped for it to survive for one year. Glass World has already been operating for almost four years and it is a prospering enterprise, which is a model for other social entrepreneurs. Glass World hosts about 20 study visits a year, and the cooperative shares its experience with other social economy initiatives from different regions of Poland.

Instead of letting their niche skills and work experience condemn them to unemployment, the members of the cooperative instead established an original and successful enterprise which preserves local heritage, contributes to

the promotion of the region and allows them to do the work they like. In 2011, Glass World was awarded by the Foundation for Social and Economic Initiatives as the best social cooperative of the year. This is one of most important awards in the social economy sector in Poland.

### **CHALLENGES**

The women (and one man) who established Glass World worked their whole life on fixed contracts employees with one company. They were specialists in manufacturing Christmas ornaments and had no experience with running a business. Therefore, it was a big challenge for them to take the risk of starting their own enterprise and taking responsibility for its development. It was especially difficult to develop the new cooperative after its predecessor bankrupted. Particularly problematic was gaining the trust of clients and the local community.

An additional challenge in this area was the fact that the enterprise was established as a social cooperative, which is a new kind of entity was and this caused additional reservations on the part of prospective clients, who had doubts if a social cooperative could be a reliable business partner. Despite these challenges, the members of Glass World cooperative managed to develop a well-functioning enterprise. This was possible thanks to their personal dedication and high-quality work, as well as support from the local community in the form of material support such as space for starting the activities as and capacity building offered to the cooperative's members. Currently, the main challenge for Glass World is further development.

The cooperative plans to expand by offering its products to clients from abroad. Its aim is not to increase production levels per se, but rather to offer work places to other women from the region who have the necessary skills to manufacture additional Christmas ornaments at Glass World.

## LESSONS LEARNED

The experience of Glass World shows that it can be worthwhile to take matters into one's own hands. It shows that the end of a company does not have to mean the end for its employees, as long as they have skills, determination, an idea for their own business and some support. The entrepreneurs from Glass World built on the experience from their previous employer.

They continued the good tradition of regional Christmas ornament production and made improvements in the area their predecessor failed, by replacing mass production with handmade products which answer to individual needs.

They greatly value partnerships with local community actors. This model of cooperation benefits both sides and is worth recommending to everybody who starts a social economy initiative.

The President of the cooperative, Marzena Hofman, stresses the advantages of taking advantage of the assistance of organisations supporting social economy development. However, from her point of view, the most effective was the advice and consultations provided on an individual basis, answering the specific needs of the given enterprise.

Piotr Zduński, Vice President of Glass World says, "Looking back after some time, I think that although I would probably find another job after the collapse of the factory in Milicz, and perhaps I would even earn more, but I would not have such satisfaction. My five minutes in a spot light."

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### INTRODUCTION

Hercules Association was founded in 1994 in Costesti, Arges County, Romania. The town of Costești is located 130 km west of Bucharest, near the city of Pitești. The Costești community includes many small villages which is why a lot of people - an estimated 10,000 people - live from agriculture. There is a single industrial unit that employs only 200 people and is on the verge of bankruptcy. The unemployment rate in Costești is higher than in the rest of Arges county.

Costești town is characterised by limited economic opportunities. The poor standards of living are the source of social problems such as alcoholism, domestic violence, separated families, and neglected children, which also contributes to high rates of illiteracy and school dropout. An increased number of children alone, unattended or in the care of elderly and sick grandparents, left by their parents who went to work abroad is another important consequence of the economic context.

### AIM(s)

Hercules Association aims to develop a strong and autonomous community in Costești town, willing and able by itself to find solutions to the problems faced. The organisation provides social and community services to those disadvantaged or at risk. Costești is the only town in the southern county of Arges, comprised of villages isolated from the main access routes, with a high unemployment rate, and where the only source of income is agriculture practiced by people in their households. Hercules Association aims to prevent and combat early school dropout, family abandonment, delinquency among adolescents, domestic violence, social exclusion and the isolation of elderly people.

### TARGET GROUP(s)

In the Costești community there is a strong need to prevent and combat problems such as: dropping out of school, domestic violence, juvenile delinquency and social exclusion or isolation of elderly people. The beneficiaries of Hercules Association are children from poor families. Additionally, the association supports their families, (single parents with two or more children with low income), and also the elderly in the community. Further, the association develops activities aimed at preventing school dropout and truancy.

### ACTIVITIES

The largest project of the association is represented by the Intergenerational Centre Hercules, the only day centre in the south of Arges, set up in 2007 in partnership with The "Princess Margareta of Romania" Foundation. The centre provides opportunities for socialisation and social involvement for recipients of all ages, bringing together children, parents and grandparents of the community, in the spirit of intergenerational practices promoted by the foundation.

The centre also develops educational and recreational activities for children and teenagers, providing the community members who are in difficult social situations with material, social, psychological and medical assistance. Thus:

- young children benefit from daily help at school, a hot meal, tutoring in sports, medical, psychological and material support;
- seniors come to the Intergenerational Center Hercules as beneficiaries but also as volunteers;
- the centre organises at trips for children and seniors to destinations in the country;
- the centre has a welcoming, consolidated, properly renovated and furnished establishment, in which it operates daily activities.

Hercules Association decided to convert an old warehouse from its courtyard into a useful building and to rent the hall for events. Construction work began in September 2008 and in April 2009 the inauguration of the hall for events took place. Construction and fitting of the rooms involved a series of steps, performed with construction companies and Hercules volunteers: works of disposal of the old buildings, demolition of sheet metal walls and reinforcement of metal structure building, sewerage and cement floor pouring, works of architecture of the building and windows and doors installing, interior construction work - painting, linoleum installation, fitting tiles, sanitary ware and connection to gas boiler installation, exterior construction works - walkways, fence, landscaped outdoor space with trees and flowers. The Hall can now be rented for weddings, meetings, conferences or sporting events. The association income can thus be supplemented and invested in the welfare of the Intergenerational Centre's beneficiaries.



Hercules Association also has a yard with about 2,000 square meters, half of which has been designed for growing vegetables and fruits. Getting the garden spatial and ecological assumed a full deployment of volunteers and beneficiaries involved. Over the entire year the association runs various activities for children and adults to ensure a hot meal and thus to provide them with some daily portion of energy.

The vegetable garden has become an important income-generating source of the association. Besides the fact that all products are fresh and contribute to the beneficiaries' healthy alimentation, this own garden is an ingenious way to significant savings. Funds that would have been spent on food recipients are now largely diverted to other activities that require financial support.

Hercules Association promotes its activities both directly, taking into account the fact that working in a small community, through promotional materials and on the website, and indirectly through its partners.

## **PARTNERSHIPS**

Hercules Association has developed a number of important partnerships. The first significant one of these came in 2006 with the "Princess Margareta of Romania" Foundation, which resulted in the association's biggest project – the Hercules Intergenerational Centre, the only day centre in the south of Arges County. The main sponsor of Hercules intergenerational centre currently is the Vodafone Romania Foundation. Other significant partners of Hercules Association are the Romanian Commercial Bank, Siemens Romania and Procter & Gamble Romania.

NESsT Romania, an important organisation supporting social economy in emerging markets, also provided the association with support for organisational development.

Hercules Association also strengthens its partnerships through memberships in networks set up by the "Princess Margareta of Romania" Foundation. "For Our Seniors" is a network of NGOs providing social services for elderly people and the ACTIV Network connects NGOs that carry out income generating activities.

## SUCCESSES

As one of the first and longstanding successful social enterprises, Hercules Association is one of pioneers in the development of social economy in Romania. The association was able to secure the support it needed by developing fruitful relationships with businesses and other support organisations. Their success has been recognised in publications about good practice and through a number of awards.

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### INTRODUCTION

La Tavella is an organic farm located on 10 hectare near Barcelona, established by the Association Viver de Bell-lloc. It is an initiative that combines the ideas of restoring traditional farming and social economy. La Tavella focuses on preserving indigenous varieties of fruits and vegetables, the tastiest and highest performing varieties, highlighting the work and experience of the peasantry. Since its first harvest in 2007, La Tavella has been a provider of seasonal vegetables to a growing number of customers in the region.

### AIM(s)

The aims of La Tavella are defined in two areas. The initiative seeks to provide sustainable employment to people at risk of social exclusion. At the same time, La Tavella aims to promote organic agriculture while preserving traditional methods of cultivating vegetables and fruit and livestock farming.

### TARGET GROUP(s)

The main group that La Tavella focuses on are people with mental disabilities or severe mental

disorders who are employed on the farm. Currently La Tavella employs 11 people, 8 of them with disabilities, who do gardening and realise the orders of the customers.

The beneficiaries-employees of La Tavella are recruited through employment agencies as well as social institutions. The selected candidates start their work with the support of a Human Resources specialist, a social worker as well as a psychologist.

### STRUCTURE

La Tavella is one of the "branches" of the special employment center Viver de Bell-lloc, which was launched by the Association Viver de Bell-lloc in 1988 with an aim to offer suitable alternative employment to people at risk of exclusion. The center currently employs around 100 workers, the majority of which are people with disabilities. They carry out a wide range of activities in different areas of work. Apart from ecological agriculture (La Tavella), this involves: forestry services, gardening, nursery, painting roads and surveillance of restricted parking zones.

La Tavella has its own legal identity, a director who manages the day-to-day work of the farm as well as kind of board consisting of two promoters providing business guidelines and support in financial matters. One of them represents the Viver de Bell-lloc Association.



## ACTIVITIES

The fields of La Tavella are used to cultivate certified organic vegetables and fruits. The team of La Tavella's employees also takes care of the distribution of its products. This is accomplished through a system of "baskets" delivered through 40 "collection points".

A "basket" is a box containing a set of La Tavella's product. The range of vegetables and fruits vary depending on the season. On the request of the customer, La Tavella may add other ecological and organic products from partnering farms, such as bread, eggs, olives, mushrooms, salsa, cheese, jam or honey. Customers choose the kind of basket (vegetables, fruits or mixed) as well as the size while placing an order on the La Tavella website. Customers can shop occasionally or make a regular order for baskets to be delivered once or twice a week. In the case of regular shopping, customers choose a three-month, six-month or one-year subscription. With a subscription, the customer is buying a certain number of baskets but the time of collection is flexible and can be arranged according to the customer's preferences.

La Tavella organised 200 collection points in Catalonia. This is where the customers pick up the ordered baskets. The collection points are located in a variety of places, such as delivery service companies, shops with ecological and organic food, shops with herbs or natural products companies. While placing an order, the customer selects a collection point from a list of possibilities proposed based on the postal code. In Barcelona, the customer can also choose to have the basket delivered at home. The day before the scheduled collection time, La Tavela sends an SMS to the customer reminding about the collection. In 2011, La Tavella was selling on average 271 baskets each month to more than 140 families.

Apart from this main activity, La Tavella takes up other initiatives aimed at promoting organic

agriculture and healthy eating by providing advisory services on gardening and organising cooking workshops. The La Tavella team also conducts classes on agro-ecology for local schools.

La Tavella also plans to expand its activities by establishing an organic egg farm and starting livestock farming with Pyrenean goats for meat, milk and dairy derivatives.

## PROMOTION

To promote its products and activities, La Tavella uses a variety of internet channels. Apart from their website these include Facebook, twitter, linkedin and pintrest. The farm also takes part in a number of events where the aims and activities of La Tavella are presented and its products can be tasted and purchased. The farm organises a promotion stand at conferences, agriculture product fairs as well as at picnics and other open air events.

## PARTNERSHIP(s)

La Tavella cooperates with other producers whose articles it adds to the baskets, including Association Trenca which produces organic olive oil and Foundation AMPANAS which delivers Urpina vines.

This foundation also runs a Special Employment and Occupational Center for the intellectually disabled. In this way, La Tavella diversifies its offer and makes it more attractive to its customers, plus other producers benefit from La Tavella's distribution system.

Through its activities aimed at promoting organic agriculture, the team of La Tavella also cooperates with educators from an organisation "L'Esquirol, Natura i Lleure". Together they organise educational events for various groups. As an initiative beneficial for the environment, La Tavella is supported by their local government, as well as landowners who offered some of their land to La Tavella so that it could develop its project.

## CERTIFICATES

The products of La Tavella are certified with a European certificate of organic production by the Catalan Council of Ecological Agricultural Production (CCPA). This institution performs thorough checks on production and processing systems, taking samples of the products to be analysed. This ensures that these products are organic and have not been contaminated with pesticides or GMOs. The certification is based on rules applying for all EU countries covered by Regulation (EC) No 834/2007.

La Tavella also hold certificates relating to their management systems – ISO 9001:2008 (quality management), ISO 14001:2004 (environmental management) and OHSAS 18001:2007 (occupational health and safety management). In addition, they hold the DisCert Certificate, which is awarded to organisations that integrate disabled persons and is verified by independent companies.

## SUCCESSES

The success of La Tavella is rekindling the social, economic and environmental values of traditional agriculture. Its team is developing new connections between the countryside and the city, as well as contributing to the social integration of disabled, and at the same time showing that running a profitable business is possible while doing all this.

An important success is integrating 11 people with disabilities into the labor market by creating a work place, together with them, where they can use their best skills, feel ownership over their work and contribute to the development of La Tavella. The success of La Tavella being accredited as a special employment center is an important recognition by the authorities who consider it a valuable partner in supporting vulnerable groups.

## CHALLENGES

La Tavella has also faced a number of challenges while developing its business. At the beginning of La Tavella's activities, the main challenge was marketing of the products, making them attractive to the customers and competitive on the market. This was a condition for the business to be successful, allowing it to sustain the jobs. La Tavella's system of baskets composed of organic certified products seemed to overcome this challenge.

Currently La Tavella works on consolidating its market position, improving its efficiency and at the same time designing the jobs in a way that best uses the capacity of its employees.

## LESSONS LEARNED

According to La Tavella's team, strong motivation is crucial in developing such an initiative. It is important to think over and define the reasons and the goals for the initiative at the beginning and then be determined to follow them.

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**Correspondence interview with Jordi Llauredó, Managing Director of La Tavella**

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### INTRODUCTION

Le Mat is one of the first social franchises in Europe. They use a method of franchising to establish special Le Mat places in different regions of Italy and also in Sweden. These places are hotels and hostels run by social enterprises. They offer services to tourists, based on common standards that are applied in all Le Mat franchises, as well as promoting a specific way of travelling, aimed at supporting local communities and sustainable tourism. At the same time, Le Mat supports people in difficult life situations – with disabilities, dealing with addiction problems or with mental illnesses. They are able to find jobs and the opportunity for professional and personal development at Le Mat. Although the idea of Le Mat was being developed already in the 1980's, it was formally established in 2004 in Trieste.

### AIM (s)

The mission of Le Mat is to create opportunities for the development of people and local communities through sustainable tourism. Le Mat aims at bringing out the best social, cultural, professional and personal qualities of people with disabilities, mental illness or a history of drug addiction – Le Mat's special people. It aims to achieve this by creating job opportunities at the right level and stimulating their entrepreneur endeavors, with prospects for a career and independence.

Le Mat's aim is also to inspire and facilitate changes in local communities and among all its actors, in terms of inclusion and solidarity as well as development and sustainability.

Le Mat is a network of accommodation providers run by social enterprises, and its aims are implemented by all of the Le Mat members. When joining the network, they commit to ensuring high standards of hospitality with a special focus on tourists with some forms of disability; providing jobs to people from disadvantaged groups; supporting local communities by providing jobs and using local products; running an environment

friendly enterprise, for example by using regional products in order to limit transport costs to a minimum. Finally, Le Mat promotes the system of social franchising founded on a network basis and aimed at developing social economy by transferring constructive practices to new places and new actors.

### TARGET GROUP(s)

There are a few groups that are key for Le Mat's work. In addition to the already mentioned disadvantaged groups who are supported by Le Mat with development opportunities and job offers, the local communities are important. Le Mat contributes to their development by promoting sustainable tourism and the regions themselves, as well as by buying local products and services and offering employment. Yet another important group are tourists – the clients of Le Mat. The hotels and hostels in the network welcome those who travel for work or pleasure.

Le Mat targets its offer at average-spending guests, who are looking for comfortable accommodation with a good quality-price ratio. Le Mat's guests are conscientious consumers who are interested in sustainable travelling and who care about the social and environmental aspects of the services they buy. In case any guest wasn't focused on these issues before, Le Mat will encourage them to do so. Finally, Le Mat is welcoming to guests with special requirements: people using wheelchairs, those with poor sight or hearing difficulties or allergies, elderly persons with restricted movement who find it hard to get around, children, and anyone else who might face barriers while travelling.

## STRUCTURE

The idea of Le Mat has been developing since 1985 when a group of young social entrepreneurs started to manage the old, one star Hotel Triton. They developed a number of solutions, which in the end became the franchise system of Le Mat. Its establishment, together with developing the Le Mat brand, was possible thanks to a grant from the EU Equal program.

Le Mat was formalised with the establishment of the Le Mat Association in 2004. This is the central organisation of the franchise which brings together social entrepreneurs, civil society activists and travellers who collectively contribute to the development of the Le Mat brand. A group of Association members works on a freelance basis and manage the franchising processes, the development of products, marketing and communication work. They develop the procedures and manuals for establishing and running Le Mat hotels and hostel, test them in different environments, and help the new Le Mat places to develop their business. This is done through trainings, consultancies and technical support. They also work to spread the Le Mat franchise outside of Italy. The Association is governed by a Board of directors, elected for three years by the members of the Association.

The Le Mat brand is available to all kinds of entrepreneurs who want to run accommodation incorporating social values. The hotel or hostel must be a social enterprise according to national law, and it also must fulfill a set of Le Mat specific requirements. These relate to the standards of services provided as well as social standards including the employment of disadvantaged groups, the promotion of the local community and its products, applying environmentally friendly procedures plus ensuring access to services by guests who are disabled or generally face barriers in the hospitality sector.

Within its franchise system, Le Mat offers hotels and other accommodation establishments two forms of affiliation, each with its own trade mark: "Le Mat friend" or "Le Mat affiliate". The "Le Mat friend" status is available to hotels and other accommodation establishments which cannot reach the full standard of Le Mat, but which share the values of Le Mat and fulfill some of its requirements, such as democratic organisation, services accessible to disabled and/or an environmentally friendly way of operating. While holding the Le Mat friend status they may want to stay in the network and improve their quality and become an affiliate in future.

"Le Mat affiliates" are mainly hotels or hostels that decide to incorporate all the standards of the Le Mat brand and become full franchise members. After making this decision, the future Le Mat place enters a process of preparation, during which the applicant adjusts its accommodation, services and working system to meet the Le Mat standards. This process is managed by the Association, based on Le Mat's procedures and manuals. However, each preparation process is different and tailor-made for each place. How the process looks like and how long it takes depends on the starting point, how advanced the hotel or hostel is in already meeting Le Mat's standards, its possibilities and capacity. This individual approach also reflects the working method of Le Mat, focused on the active participation of all worker-entrepreneurs in the group to construct the instruments and products. The preparation process starts with an initial visit of Le Mat representatives who, following this, prepare a proposal detailing a plan for the implementation of Le Mat standards. If this is accepted by the hotel or hostel, a preliminary agreement is signed and an admission fee is paid. Le Mat prepares a customised manual for each place and facilitates the adaptation work. Once completed, the franchise contract is signed and the hotel or hostel is granted the right to use the Le Mat brand.

Usually the Le Mat brand is given to already existing places that want to become a part of the franchise. However, different groups and organisations may join Le Mat. This could include a worker-owned cooperative or social enterprise wishing to open a hotel, unemployed or precariously employed people who wish to start an enterprise, or a social enterprise running a scarcely profitable hostel and wanting to do better in the hotel sector. Similarly, this could be a local authority wishing to salvage an abandoned edifice and create local jobs by supporting a social enterprise, or a non-governmental organisation working with disabled. This even could be a bank, company or development agency wishing to invest in the profitable entrepreneurial sector. Or it could be a group of friends wishing to make pleasurable use of their time.

Currently, there are 11 Le Mat hotels in Italy and an additional 6 across Europe (in Sweden, Germany, Spain, Poland and the UK). On the European level, the Le Mat brand is owned by Le Mat Italy and Le Mat Sweden.

## ACTIVITIES

Since Le Mat is a hotel franchise, its core activities involve providing hospitality services. However, since it is a franchise of social enterprises it also engages in promoting sustainable tourism, contributing to the development of local communities, spreading the idea of social economy. Further, it works to overcome stereotypes about disadvantaged groups and to create opportunities to empower them, especially by offering stimulating entrepreneurship with employment and integration in the communities.

The average Le Mat place is a mid-scale hotel. It conforms to international standards and is preferably situated in the main town of a province with trading, industrial, business, scientific and cultural facilities as well as good transportation connections. What is most important is that

its staff and management include people with particular experiences, relating to exclusion, disability or discrimination. The high quality of service is accompanied with a smile and all kinds of assistance for guests with special needs. The average hotel is attractively priced and offers 30-60 bedrooms and provides jobs for 6-8 people. Fewer rooms would make it hard to sustain the labour costs while keeping prices affordable. It typically offers a free, high-quality breakfast buffet consisting mainly of organic and fair trade products. It is also conveniently situated in terms of access to restaurants. The staff are well acquainted with the town and its surroundings and are able to give sightseeing and logistic recommendations to the guests. The atmosphere is positive and hospitable.

Each of Le Mat's social franchisees has its own Quality Handbook, which has been developed in consultation with all members of the team, and with the help of the Le Mat Association. These site-specific Handbooks set down rules of daily work and management.

However, all Le Mat places share a management style aimed at placing disabled and non-disabled workers side by side and contributing in different ways to social inclusion. Different hotels and hostels implement this approach in different ways, depending on their organisational structures. For example, in Italy, hotels may be run by social cooperatives type A or type B. The first type offer various types of support, other than employment, to disadvantaged groups. This may involve accommodation or care services.

An example of a type A cooperative is GranCan in Verona, which provides accommodation to people with mental health issues who manufacture hand-made lamps. The idea behind this activity is to contribute to the recovery and social integration of the beneficiaries by putting them in contact with other people – the hotel staff and tourists who stay at the same hotel.

An example of a type B cooperative is a Le Mat hotel in Umbria, where the social engagement is manifested by employing people from disadvantaged groups as hotel staff. Each Le Mat hotel or hostel also has a personalised Quality Assurance Card to be offered to their guests for comments, suggestions, and feedback. They want travellers to be a part of the evaluation and quality development process, and in this way to contribute to the improvement of the Le Mat services.

### **PARTNERSHIP(s)**

Since one of the aims of Le Mat is contributing to the development of local communities, Le Mat places build partnerships with local actors. This can include suppliers such as local food producers, or providers of tourism-related services that promote local culture or other places that can be recommended by the hotels. This also includes local non-governmental organisations working with disadvantaged groups that often assist the hotels to employ their beneficiaries. Last but not least, this includes local authorities which often provide Le Mat hotels with the buildings to start their activities. This support may also be financial, as is in case for GranCan in Verona, where the local government covers the costs for people with mental health issues, as part of their therapy and recovery process. Apart from its active involvement at a local level, Le Mat also develops cooperation nationally and internationally. It works with travel agencies promoting Le Mat places, as well as organisations supporting the social economy sector. Le Mat is a member of the European Network of Social Franchising (ESFN), which is active at the EU level and promotes the concept of social franchising and best practices in this area, as well as working to create a positive environment for the development of social franchising. Le Mat is also a member of the Italian Association of Responsible Tourism, which supports and promotes sustainable travelling.

### **CERTIFICATES**

One of the requirements for Le Mat hotels is that they should meet the standards of the EU Ecolabel certificate. This identifies products and services that have a reduced environmental impact throughout their life cycle, from the extraction of raw material through to production, use and disposal. Recognised throughout Europe, the EU Ecolabel is a voluntary label that can be trusted, promoting environmental excellence.

Individual hotels and hostel have also been granted with other certificates, confirming the standards they implement. For example, the "Kilometer zero" certificate was awarded to the Gran Can hotel in Verona, which recognises the commitment of this enterprise to environmentally friendly consumption and supporting local products. The certificate means that the hotel uses local products, as a way to limit the environmental impact of transport to a minimum.

### **SUCSESSES**

Le Mat has been successful in terms of achieving both economic and social goals. It definitely contributes to the development of social entrepreneurship, especially the specific format of social franchising. It also contributes to satisfying the needs of disadvantaged groups, and proves that grassroots initiatives are worth supporting and very effective in fostering the development of local communities and its members. In the area of entrepreneurship, Le Mat managed to develop a professional franchise system that enables small, often family-run hotels or hostels to become recognised not only in Italy but across Europe. What's more, this is not a classical franchise with strict rules or requirements. Instead, every Le Mat place is unique and based on the resources available in its environment. Every hotel or hostel is different, but the network is united by its social and ecological values and its special hospitality.



Le Mat's key success in the social area is in providing integration services for disadvantaged groups – jobs, accommodation and care. Le Mat places put the idea of "integration" into practice. By including disadvantaged groups into the everyday life of hospitality services and providing engagement with tourists, Le Mat's clients also have the chance to change their opinions and challenge stereotypes about people with disabilities or mental health problems. The idea of the Le Mat brand is a good example of how a grassroots initiative can spread. It was first envisioned as a method to help the patients of a mental hospital, where the staff of the hospital came up with the idea. With money from the EU, a franchising system developed. But still, Le Mat places are based on local initiative to create accommodation for tourists from around the world that also serves the local community.

## CHALLENGES

The challenge for Le Mat – just as is the case with many other social and commercial businesses in Italy – results from the consequences of economic crisis, which has significantly impacted on the tourist sector. Financial instability is the main reason for people to resign from travelling. Less tourists means less money for hotels, including Le Mat places.

The crisis has also impacted on the policies of local authorities in Italy. The support usually provided to social entrepreneurs has decreased. The cuts in spending limit chances for direct funding from local government and it's also more difficult to be granted a building that could be adapted into a hotel.

Although it is not easy to deal with, the sustainable hotels and hostel in the Le Mat network have a chance to survive the crisis thanks to loyal clients they gained with their special approach. However, it is difficult to develop new franchisees in this economic environment.

## LESSONS LEARNED

The example of Le Mat shows that the key to success is an entrepreneurial approach to solving identified social problems. When presenting the example of Le Mat, Mario Wojtowicz – an expert from the organisation Domus Italia which supports Polish and Italian social economy – stressed that social enterprises should not be started by looking for funding or joining EU projects. Instead, he feels that social enterprise should be based on grassroots initiatives answering to the needs of people and communities. He says it is important to find the real "need", find the answer to it, and then look for an investor. He also underlined the importance of carefully choosing members and staff for social enterprises. "It is better if the core management consists of people with some business and social background. An enterprise consisting only of people from disadvantage group has less of a chance for success."

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## Mom's Cooperative

### INTRODUCTION

The Moms' Cooperative was initiated in Poland in 2011, and came about through a project of MAMA Foundation, Accor Foundation and Orbis Group which aimed to integrate unemployed mothers into the labour market by involving them in a social economy initiative. The project was supported by the Accor Foundation and employees of Orbis. Fifteen mothers went through a series of vocational trainings, as well as integration and motivation workshops, in order to establish a social cooperative that would produce articles for everyday use such as bags, laptop or glasses cases using designs inspired by Polish folk art. The cooperative has gone through a number of changes since its initiation, continuing to develop and offering an ever-widening range of products to tourists, companies and individual clients in Poland.

### AIM(s)

The primary goal for the Moms' Cooperative is to create a sustainable enterprise which will be able to provide jobs for the Cooperative's members and continuously develop its activities. In the longer perspective, when the situation of the Cooperative stabilises, the Moms aim to contribute to the professional activation of women and the development of women's entrepreneurship, sharing their experiences to support other mothers in establishing their own social economy initiatives. Moms also aim to be involved in local community life, conducting handcraft and sewing workshops for its members as well as organising activities for children and other interested groups.

### TARGET GROUP(s)

The members of Moms' Cooperative started to work together during the project aimed at involving them in a social economy initiative. The target group of this project were unemployed

mothers and this is what brought them together. Today, they see themselves rather as women who run their own social business and they happen to be mothers.



They want to create a work space which is friendly for women with children, flexible enough for them to be able to reconcile their professional and family life but, at the same time, they stress the need for dedication to the development of their Cooperative.

The members of the Moms' Cooperative do not wish to be considered as a disadvantaged group. They believe that this identification is a stigma that does not help social inclusion, but makes it more difficult. They see their cooperative as an alternative model of an enterprise that answers their needs as mothers-entrepreneurs.

### STRUCTURE

Moms' Cooperative has the status of a social cooperative under Polish law. It started its official activities with 12 members, but it went through significant changes during 2012. This was the period when the project support finished and when the Cooperative faced the realities of the open market.

Due to the required adaptation, restructuring, personal decisions and financial constraints, the number of the Cooperative's members decreased during this time. Currently, there are six members of the cooperative, five of them work at Mom's Cooperative, of which three are employed on part time work contracts and three work on an hourly basis and their involvement varies depending on the amount of work. The Cooperative has a president and a board which manage its day to day functioning, with all members meeting during periodic general assemblies. The members agree on the vision and mission of the organisation, develop general strategic goals as well as annual plans, which they try to implement and monitor on daily basis.

During periods of intensive production, the Cooperative additionally employs two outside workers who help the staff to meet order deadlines. Moms' Cooperative will also be utilising the opportunity of sponsored internship offered by the Labour Office.



This will allow the Cooperative to employ an experienced seamstress whose salary will be paid by the Labour Office as a part of a support program for unemployed. This person will be able to start working again, and Moms' Cooperative will gain an experienced employee for three months who

will support the Cooperative to realise orders, as well as contributing to the development of the sewing skills of other less experienced members of the cooperative. When the internship finishes the seamstress will be employed by the Cooperative.

## ACTIVITIES

Moms' Cooperative is producing and selling a number of handcraft products, such as: bags, cases for laptops, phones and tablets, glasses cases, pencils cases, business cards holders, covers for calendars and notebooks, as well as jewelry.



Most of these products are made of felt and decorated with embroidered motives inspired by Polish folk art. All of them are handmade with original designs by Moms' Cooperative. The production takes place in the Cooperative's workshop although it happens that the moms also work at home. All of the members of the Cooperative are involved in manufacturing, either directly through designing and sewing the products or indirectly by organising the supply of materials. The products are offered in the Moms' Cooperative's on-line shop as well as distributed in 26 Accor hotels in Poland such as Ibis, Novotel and others. Moms' Cooperative's products are usually put on show in cabinets or counter displays and sold to tourists as interesting souvenirs from Poland.

In addition, Moms' Cooperative accepts occasional orders from companies for the production of promotional items, such as felt bags with the company's logo, which can be used during conferences instead of folders for supporting documents, or business cards holders or felt covers for calendars and notebooks. The Moms' Cooperative products are also offered at various events, outdoor pick nicks, or Christmas as well as summer fairs.

Among the clients of Moms' Cooperative, there are different NGOs that order promotional articles or other products used during events they organise. They choose Moms' Cooperative as a supplier not only due to the quality of the products, but also due to its social economy profile.



## MARKETING

Apart from the promotion through the Accor hotels that distribute Moms' products, the Cooperative focuses on marketing through internet channels. It has its own on-line shop as

well as a Facebook fanpage, where the products are advertised. Moms' Cooperative is also using other opportunities for promotion. It became one of the sponsors of a concert in the Mazovian Center of Culture and Art in Warsaw where it provided 200 felt bags with Cooperative's logo, which were used instead of folders for materials distributed among the audience.

Still, the Moms does not yet fully exploit media interest, as there is neither capacity in the Cooperative to invest in media promotion, nor to deal with potential larger orders which media promotion could result in. The Cooperative plans to develop the cooperation with media in future.

## PARTNERSHIP(s)

The Moms' Cooperative was established as a result of the partnership between an NGO, (MAMA Foundation) and Accor Foundation. The project, aimed at occupational activation of unemployed mothers through establishment of social economy enterprise, was implemented by Mama Foundation as well as Orbis employees and financially supported by Accor as a part of its CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) strategy. Today, Moms' Cooperative is an independent entity which continues cooperation with all partners. MAMA Foundation sells the products in the café that they run, and Accor in their hotels. Also Orbis is placing occasional orders for Mom's Cooperative products.

Moms' Cooperative actively engages in partnership with other social economy enterprises in order to contribute to the development and strengthening of the social economy sector in Poland. Małgorzata Falis, the president of Moms' Cooperative, is a member of the Commission of Dialogue for Social Economy of the City of Warsaw.

According to her, "The resources invested in the development of the social economy sector are huge, but not always efficiently used. A cooperative like ours would benefit more from different instruments that would help with sustainable development - such as social clauses in public procurement of, for example, the City of Warsaw." Through the Commission on Dialogue for Social Economy Moms' Cooperative also engages in other actions aimed at practical support for social economy initiatives, such as laws enabling preferential renting of city buildings for social economy activities. It also is involved in longer perspective initiatives like discussions about establishing a cluster for social economy in Warsaw and other ideas aimed at strengthening the support of local authorities for social economy development in the capital city, based on good practices from other regions of Poland.

## CERTIFICATES

Currently the Moms' Cooperative is not certified although it uses sometimes the certified products or materials. However, the members of the Cooperative plan to develop a new line of products for children. In order to meet the standards of this kind of production, they need to use certified materials which meet the quality and safety requirements necessary with products for children.

The Cooperative also plans to take part in a contest for the best social economy enterprise, where finalists are awarded with a certificate [eS] which is another tool for marketing and promotion. This is important for aware clients, especially third sector organisations who take into account the social aspects of the production of products they buy and the services they order. These clients could choose as their supplier a certified social enterprise over a commercial company.

## SUCSESSES

Having faced a number of problems with sustaining its activities after the money and support ended for the project initiating Moms' Cooperative, the current Cooperative considers the fact that it still exists and continues to develop to be a success. Particularly important was the fact that the Cooperative continued its daily activities despite all the changes taking place in its structures, such as diminishing the team from 15 to 5 people. They managed to significantly improve the structure and the internal relations. Although the number of Cooperative's members diminished, the current team worked out clear rules of cooperation and achieved relative financial stability. They have a sense of ownership as well as a vision for the future development of the cooperative, which is crucial for every enterprise and especially in case of an entity established by external actors within a project. Another successful progress is the significant increase in the quality of Moms' Cooperative products. These are more and more technically advanced, and the range of products has widened. Starting from simple jewelry, they now offer a number of new designs and product lines including a variety of articles for daily use. Finally, also as a result of the PR efforts from the initiators, the Moms' Cooperative brand is recognised which is an important asset to further development of the Cooperative.





## CHALLENGES

The main challenge for Moms' Cooperative was continuing the work of the Cooperative after the initiating project finished. This was due to the lack of a sense of ownership of some of the Cooperative members and, resulting from this, a lack of willingness to take responsibility for the development of the Cooperative and to make the necessary investments in terms of time, skills and possible funding. This led to a number of problems with limited funds, with distribution of work, as well as in relations between the Cooperative members. The Moms also faced the fact that some of the social ideas on which the emphasis was placed during the preparation trainings within the project was not possible to implement given the economic reality the Cooperative faced when it began to function. As a result, some of the Cooperative members left and the five who stayed worked to further develop the initiative, based on the new rules they established.

Another challenge is absorbing the orders, since there is neither sufficient infrastructure nor enough staff to realise bigger orders in a short time. At the same time, the irregularity of such orders makes it difficult to build the capacity which would allow the Cooperative to take the orders, including offering attractive salaries to the potential employees. It's a vicious circle which the Moms' Cooperative try to break by ensuring a gradual development of the enterprise, slowly build the capacity which allows the Cooperative to realise more and more orders. This is done by strengthening the structure and maintaining sustainable cooperation with outside workers who are flexible enough to be involved in irregular orders. The Moms' Cooperative aims to develop and strengthen cooperation with regular clients who would ensure the sustainability of the Cooperative and allow for further development through increased promotion and realisation of larger occasional orders. For the same reasons, Moms' Cooperative also engages in lobbying activities aimed at the facilitation of sustainable

development of the social economy sector in Poland. For example, the Cooperative joins actions aimed at introducing social clauses to the public procurement of the local institutions. This would open new opportunities for supplying the public sector with products and services by social economy initiatives.

For the past year, Moms' Cooperative has also worked a lot on improving the quality of its products and investing in professional equipment. They plan is to build a network of collaborators who can be mobilised when there are bigger order. The Cooperative also has been trying to gradually increase the rates paid to workers. They aim to ensure sustainable employment for five people who would work on fixed contracts and contribute to the development of the cooperative.

## LESSONS LEARNED

Moms' experience showed that it is very useful to take part in the variety of capacity building trainings offered by the organisations and institutions initiating and supporting the creation of Mom's Cooperative (MAMA Foundation) as well as those working on the development of social economy in general. Moms' Cooperative found especially valuable the workshops supporting structural development and those enabling the professional aspects of different areas of the Cooperative's work, for example: strengthening the skills in managing the online shop and its promotion in the internet, through various electronic communication channels and social media.

This kind of support is offered by the local Center to Support Social Economy (these kind of institutions function in different regions of Poland), which Moms' Cooperative regularly utilises. It was also very helpful to take part in a study visit to another, more experienced cooperative and to see how the work of a social economy enterprise



looks like in practice. The president of Moms' Cooperative recommends it for every new social economy enterprise.

She also strongly recommends conducting analysis of the needs and of the market reality for the sector in which the new social economy initiatives plans to operate. It is crucial to use the expertise of professionals in the respective field, and it's worth paying for such expertise even from the own funds of the future entrepreneurs. Another piece of advice from Moms' is to invest in building relations between the cooperative members before starting official activities. A good idea could also be to have pilot activities, to exercise the functioning of the new initiative in practice without taking on all related responsibilities at once.

Finally, it's worth knowing that, for the first year or two, the cooperative is rather an investment either of money or time than a source of income. "I ask potential social entrepreneurs if they ever thought of running their own business, because this is what they should be prepared for when starting their own social economy initiative," says Małgorzata Falis. If a group of social entrepreneurs starts from "zero" they do not earn much – if anything – until they build a group of reliable clients and are able to cover the daily expenses. They also have to face the same requirements that every employer faces, like fulfilling labour codes or health and safety regulations and dealing with various types of inspections. It's good to be prepared for that. This is also why the support from the local community and public institutions is crucial, especially in cases where long-term unemployed people start their own social economy initiative.

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### INTRODUCTION

Optimômes is a social enterprise providing childcare services. It was founded in 1996 in France by Anne Karine Stocchetti who, after experiencing difficulties reconciling work and childcare herself, decided to develop services answering the needs of parents working irregular and non-standard hours. Anne Stocchetti created Optimômes to incubate and pilot her new model of caring for children "after hours". At the beginning, its development was supported by EU grants within the EQUAL program. Fueled by positive initial results, she successfully developed self-sustainable franchises of Optimômes' childcare services: Gepetto, (providing childcare at the children's homes), and Minuscule, (small nurseries).

### AIM(s)

According to estimations from Optimômes, around 30% of employees in France – of which many are parents – work untraditional hours in the early mornings, evenings, weekends or on holidays. At these times, the majority of childcare facilities do not operate. The parents have to rely on family and friends to look after their children, but it happens that often children are left on their own or under the care of the eldest sibling, who could be also very young.

The aim of Optimômes is to provide a solution to this problem and to fill the gap in French childcare service, in order to help parents working non-standard hours to reconcile their professional and family life.

### TARGET GROUP(s)

The beneficiaries of Optimômes' activities are working parents and their children aged 0-13 years. A significant target group are single parents. They constitute over 60% of the beneficiaries of Optimômes' Gepetto services – childcare provided

at home. The majority of these are women – single mothers. Optimômes also focuses on parents with lower income, which often does not allow them to use other childcare services. The cost for group childcare in France is around €19 per day, whereas home childcare costs around €28 per day or more if during non-standard hours. Optimômes rates are calculated on the basis of individual household revenues, with prices beginning at €1.50 per hour for households earning less than €550 a month.

### STRUCTURE

Optimômes is a social enterprise that operates through a social franchise system. It was developed by the non-profit organisation Optimômes Development through a pilot project funded by the EU's EQUAL Programme. This support finished in 2006 and the Optimômes Development was closed as an organisation, which had been established for the purpose of developing and testing the Gepetto child care model. During this time, Gepetto was set up as a social franchise to enable the rapid scaling of similar services across the country, offering the same quality care in people's homes at affordable prices for parents working odd hours. Since 2006, the social enterprise Optimômes has been managing the franchise. The process starts by establishing partnerships and screening the entrepreneurs who wish to franchise Gepetto in their city or commune. Then, Optimômes provides them with the methodology and tools to set up a child care service - Gepetto. In order to activate a new Gepetto unit, franchise partners need to follow a common strategy: hire professionals with a young children teacher's diploma and child welfare auxiliaries; take part and contribute to the creation of common tools; follow the methodology and teacher training; agree to cooperate and to pool their practices for transfers.

Optimomes is responsible for the quality control of services provided by the franchises through regular monitoring and evaluation. The team of Optimomes consists of its founder and director Anne-Karine Stocchetti plus eight other people, including administrative staff and regional coordinators responsible for the development of Gepetto at a national level.

## ACTIVITIES

Optimomes' activities involve providing childcare in two main formats: Gepetto and Minuscules, which uses the model of a "solidarity nursery" (la crèche solidaire), developed by Optimomes.

The Gepetto model mainly provides childcare through franchise centers, during non-standard hours as a complementary service to other childcare facilities operating during regular hours. Gepetto childcare is offered to children 0-13 years old and is organised at their homes. Its services are available seven days a week, day or night (early morning, late at night, at weekends or on holidays). Parents estimate their needs for childcare (days and hours) each week and issue requests for the service every Thursday to their local Gepetto center. They can change the days and hours each week according to their irregular work schedule. Additionally, in cases of unexpected changes in their working hours, parents can utilise an emergency service also offered by Gepetto. Each franchise center employs trained professionals who work with Gepetto's trademarked "red bag" filled with games, learning tools and writing utensils to help children develop while having fun. Currently, the Gepetto childcare service is available in five regions of France.

Another form of childcare offered by Optimomes uses the Minuscules model. These are small nurseries located in specially furnished apartments to meet the needs of children. Pooling efforts and reducing costs, each Minuscules unit can accommodate a small group of up to 12 children

in a family-oriented framework, a little "home". These nurseries are animated by a team of professionals specialising in early childhood care. They operate during the day and provide services for local communities or small and medium-sized enterprises.

The first Minuscules was established in 2009 in Vannes. It is supported by La caisse d'allocations Familiales (CAF) and the General Council of Morbihan. Users are private companies, public companies and other inhabitants of the city. Currently, the Minuscules childcare service is available in six regions of France.

Minuscules are often established in cooperation with local communities or companies in order to provide childcare services to their employees or inhabitants. These partners sign agreements with Optimomes in order to reserve a number of places in Minuscules. They also have a contract with Gepetto for a fixed number of hours of childcare provided at home. These agreements, with a minimum number of "booked hours", allow Optimomes to commit to providing continuous services and to run the business. The partners are charged separately for additional hours of childcare provided on request. The costs of these services are covered primarily by the employers or by the community, but partially also by a means-tested contribution from the family.

Optimomes works to convince businesses to invest also in Gepetto's facilities. It stresses the dependency of a company's economic development on its human resources and that increasing their market value is also linked to the loyalty of their employees. Therefore, reconciling the work and family life of their employees who work irregular hours should not be seen as a burden but as an investment. Parents who work irregular hours are more efficient in their work if they know that their children are professionally looked after.

## MARKETING

Optimomes does not have a developed marketing strategy, although it is often presented in the media as an alternative childcare provider and its activities are an interesting topic for the public. The majority of Optimomes' clients or beneficiaries get to know about its services through word of mouth. Optimomes carries out external evaluations of its activities and presents this to the public, showing its specific impact and how it answers to the needs of parents. Recent evaluation of the Gepetto model indicates that it provides significant stability for children and frequently results in better performance at school, greater peace of mind for parents and dramatic reductions in absences at work which, combined with higher productivity, is an undisputed benefit to the employer. In 2007, the Schwab Foundation awarded Optimomes as the Social Entrepreneur of the Year in France.

## PARTNERSHIP(s)

Both local authorities and companies are key partners for Optimomes, since a contract to provide a regular minimum number of hours of childcare allows Optimomes to start the services in a given community. Optimomes cooperates with local authorities and social institutions in a number of regions in France, including those supporting families, as well as at the national level with the Ministry of Labor, Employment, Vocational Training and Social Dialogue. All of these institutions are partners for Optimomes to develop its activities.

Apart from public institutions, Optimomes also cooperates with private foundations focusing on social and economic development and empowerment, including the foundation LA MONDIALE. Optimomes is also supported by social investors such as Brittany Solidarity Capital (BCS) and Cigales Bretagne, a club of investors.

## SUCSESSES

The undoubtable success of Optimomes is the creation of a well functioning system of solidarity nurseries managed through Gepetto and Minuscules, which is an efficient solution answering the needs of parents and children, especially for families with lower income. Since its launch in 2003, over 1,800 children from 1,200 families have benefited from the services of Gepetto. Sixty percent of these families are single-parent households, the majority headed by women. This success has also been recognised by the National Family Allowance Fund, a public institution which regularly engages in establishing Optimomes services in different regions of France. Managed by cooperative groups which are joined also by local authorities and women's rights organisations, the model of Optimomes successfully fills the gap in French childcare system.

## CHALLENGES

When Optimomes was starting the services of Gepetto and Minuscles, the biggest challenge it faced was convincing local authorities and employers that parents who work irregular hours need an adequate childcare system, that it should be affordable for everybody, and that local authorities and employers should support the development of this system. Now, when Gepetto and Minuscles function efficiently and are recognised as successful and worth supporting, the challenge is to maintain high quality childcare services. While the costs of small, family-like childcare centers may be higher than organising nurseries for larger groups, it is essential, according to Anne Stocchetti, that children are taken care of in smaller groups where there is space to answer the needs of each child in a peaceful atmosphere so they can build relations and develop themselves.

## LESSONS LEARNED

The most important lesson learned by Optimomes is the crucial role of partnerships. According to Anne Stocchetti, the development of childcare services is a collective project. Success is possible when there is cooperation between the local community, employers and parents. It is very important to provide them with opportunity to be involved, to express their needs, to find commonly acceptable solutions and to feel ownership of the initiative.

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### INTRODUCTION

Re Tech Life is a social enterprise that was established in 2005 in Milan, Italy. Its founders identified social and environmental problems and decided to propose a solution through a social enterprise. The problems they address are, on one hand, the social integration of prisoners or former prisoners and their limited opportunities to find jobs and, on the other hand, the management of electronic waste. Linking these two issues together, and using the momentum of the introduction of a new EU directive on Waste from Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE), led to the establishment of Re Tech Life. The enterprise employs prisoners to recover and recycle electronic waste.

### AIM(s)

In its activities, Re Tech Life combines the implementation of economic, social and environmental goals.

As a business entity, Re Tech Life aims to make profits and to stimulate innovative development of the enterprise. Re Tech Life also aims to provide a solution to the problem of the decreasing funds for social inclusion and reintegration work by funding this work using the social entrepreneurship model. In particular, its goal is to promote the full reintegration of disadvantaged groups, mainly prisoners, into society through training and work.

The enterprise also strives to increase computer literacy by donating regenerated computers to schools as well as supporting non-profit organisations with donations of equipment that still can be used after being reconditioned.

Finally, Re Tech Life's aim is to contribute to sustainable development by facilitating ecological management of electronic waste. By collection, reclamation and recycling high-tech material at

the end of its life cycle, it offers a solution to the problem of their disposal.

### TARGET GROUP(s)

The main beneficiaries of Re Tech Life's activities are disadvantaged groups whose social inclusion is facilitated by the enterprise. The majority here are prisoners or former prisoners. The basis for their employment at the enterprise is stipulated by the Italian law stating that "the organisation and method of prisoners working should reflect that of the free society in order for them to acquire adequate professional training within normal working conditions in order to facilitate social reintegration".

Re Tech Life cooperates with prisons in Italy. It has developed a process of employing the prisoners and facilitating their work. It starts with personal interviews based on which the workers are selected. At the end of 2012, the enterprise had conducted 162 interviews as a result of which 92 people were employed. The next step is a series of training sessions particularly aimed at the development of professional skills and preparation of the prospective worker to perform the specific tasks at Re Tech Life. As of November 2012, Re Tech Life had conducted 1,600 training hours for prisoners inside prisons, to promote working opportunities in the outside world, to ensure the usability of professional skills, and to show the prisoners the possibility of different legal alternatives. After receiving training, the workers are employed and join the enterprise as its employees. While working at Re Tech Life, they are supported by more experienced employees and offered advice as well as administrative support. Re Tech Life also assists its former employees to look for other jobs outside the enterprise.



## STRUCTURE

Re Tech Life is a social enterprise with a strong business component, acting according to its business plans and making profits. At the same time, it has the status of a social enterprise type B according to Italian law, which means it employs people from disadvantaged groups, mainly prisoners.

Re Tech Life is governed by a Board and a nominated Director, who manages the work of the enterprise on a daily basis. The enterprise also employs experts and administrative staff, who are not necessarily recruited from disadvantaged groups. One of the key employees is a human resources specialist experienced in working with disadvantaged groups, who manages the social aspect of the enterprise work.

Re Tech Life employs between 19 and 25 people, depending on the workload, about 60% of whom are from disadvantaged groups. The employment is full or part time. There are also volunteers working at Re Tech Life, who are often people threatened with social exclusion. In addition, Re Tech Life provides opportunities for internships in collaboration with technical colleges. In 2011, 24 people utilised this opportunity.

## ACTIVITIES

Re Tech Life's business model involves obtaining Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) from 3 sources: individual households, small enterprises and large enterprises. After collection, WEEE are processed at Re Tech Life's plant which manages the recycling of the waste as well as recovering of used computers, printers, etc. The outcome of this process results in either secondary raw materials or regenerated equipment that is supplied to computer hardware stores (for resale) or is donated to non-governmental organisations or schools. Re Tech Life often acts as an intermediary between companies that are

getting rid of old equipment and want to donate it to an organisation or school.

The prisoners employed at Re Tech Life usually work as operators of the recycling machines or as maintenance workers. Those who are still serving their prison time are usually transported to the factory and back by prison staff, with specific arrangements depending on the prison. Re Tech Life also employs ex-prisoners as well as people on parole.

## PARTNERSHIP(s)

In order to successfully implement their various goals, Re Tech Life has developed cooperation with different partners.

The enterprise works with a number of prisons, including Bollate, Monza, Lecco and Opera. Prisoners from these institutions work in Re Tech Life as a part of their rehabilitation process.

As a type B social enterprise, providing jobs for members of vulnerable groups, Re Tech Life collaborates with local governments that support the social aspects of the enterprise's activities with additional funding.

Re Tech Life also builds long-term partnerships with key clients, especially larger companies, mostly banks and multinationals. One of these is UniCredit, which has been cooperating with Re Tech Life for a few years regarding the disposal of their electrical and electronic equipment waste (WEEE), and they have prolonged the agreement with the enterprise for a longer period. The used equipment from UniCredit goes to a plant which employs inmates from the prison in Bollate near Milan. They work to recondition the equipment as much as possible and dispose properly of the equipment that is no longer usable.

## **CERTIFICATES**

Re Tech Life holds two certificates from the International Organization of Standardization. ISO 9001 certifies the quality management system and is designed to help organisations ensure that they meet the needs of customers and other stakeholders while implementing statutory and regulatory requirements related to the product or service. The second certificate awarded to Re Tech Life is ISO 14001 which focuses on the environmental management system. This certificate ensures that the environmental impact of the enterprise is being measured and improved. The main benefits of using these involve the reduced cost of waste management, savings in energy consumption of materials, lower distribution costs and an improved corporate image among regulators, customers and the public.

## **SUCSESSES**

One significant success of Re Tech Life is its contribution to the resocialisation and social inclusion of prisoners. Statistics show that more than 50% of prisoners who do not work while serving their sentence in prison commit another crime after being released. Among those employed during their sentence, the percentage is much lower – 17%. However, it is very difficult for prisoners or ex-prisoners to find any kind of employment and providing jobs to this group is a challenge. Therefore, the success of Re Tech Life in this area is significant. In addition to employing almost 100 people from disadvantaged groups, mainly prisoners, Re Tech Life has also conducted over 1500 hours of training in the prisons. This has increased the professional skills of inmates and has enhanced their job prospects when they are released from prison.

Re Tech Life is also successful in reducing the negative impact on the environment. For example, in 2011, the enterprise managed to recover and

recycle of 287 tons of secondary raw materials. After the manual breakdown of the equipment, 94% of the secondary raw materials was prepared for reuse. Re Tech Life recovers 30,000-35,000 personal computers and 10,000-15,000 printers a year. About 20,000 computers have been donated to schools and organisations.

While achieving these social and environmental successes, Re Tech Life also managed to build small but economically stable and profitable enterprise.

## **CHALLENGES**

The main challenge for Re Tech Life is employing disadvantaged workers who require more attention and time to become efficient in their work, while at the same time acting as a profit-oriented company that needs to fulfill all its obligations to clients, meet deadlines and deal with competition.

Working with disadvantage groups often means dealing with people who have never worked before, who may have problems taking responsibility for their work or may even have difficulties showing up to work every day. Many of them are dealing with serious personal problems such as addictions.

The special attention provided for them by experienced staff limits the risks, but still being competitive on the open market while offering support to vulnerable employees is a challenge.

## LESSONS LEARNED

Establishing an enterprise such as Re Tech Life requires important preparation. Electronic waste management requires technical knowledge and skills. It is also crucial to learn about the national and international regulations concerning the recycling processes which are complicated. Working with disadvantaged groups, including prisoners, also requires specific knowledge, skills and experience. Finally, this kind of enterprise demands a rather large investment (as the machines and equipment to recycle things are expensive). Therefore, it is worth conducting extensive consultations with specialists from various disciplines before starting similar initiative.

This is also why the founders of Re Tech Life started with a pilot project, developed in cooperation with experts, during which they were able to test their work model. That project, funded by an EU grant, involved checking the operational capabilities, obtaining the required permissions, designing and creating the operational spaces and working out a model for employing and managing the work for members of vulnerable groups. At the same time, it is important that any idea for a social enterprise is based on solid business grounds and is designed to generate profits, allowing for the sustainability of the enterprise instead of depending on external funding.

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## INTRODUCTION

Sineo, meaning “without water” in Latin, is a French social enterprise founded in 2004 by Olivier Desurmont who came up with the idea of developing eco-friendly and waterless car washing products and services. Today, Sineo is not only appreciated by private individuals but also automotive professionals, which ensures 70% of the enterprise’s turnover. While running a successful and ecological business, Sineo offers jobs and social support to people who have found themselves in difficult life situation. Sineo helps them to get back on their feet and find permanent employment.

## AIM(s)

Sineo has three objectives: contributing to the protection of the environment, implementing a social reintegration system for disadvantaged groups and achieving economic profitability. SINEO aims at implementing and promoting the responsible use of water and energy, as well as developing and using products with limited impact on the environment. Alongside its environmental interests, SINEO has a strong commitment to addressing social issues. It provides a chance for social reintegration and a career trampoline for people in difficult life situations. The social goal of Sineo is to help 100% of its employees who continue working with the company for the duration of their two years contract to get back into the labour market. At the same time, Sineo aims to be an economically successful enterprise which is able to sustainably implement its environmental and social goals.

## TARGET GROUP(s)

The target group of Sineo as a business initiative are undoubtedly the consumers of its products and services, both individuals as well as companies. Therefore, as with any other company, Sineo works to offer a good quality service and competitive

prices. They make efforts to understand and answer the needs of consumers who are already searching for environment friendly products and services, as well as contributing to raising the awareness of others.

Another important group for Sineo are its employees and beneficiaries. Eighty five percent of Sineo’s employees are people in need of social reinsertion – long-term unemployed, recipients of minimum social reinsertion income benefit, disabled people, etc. Sineo recruits its employees through an unemployment centre and other institutions and organisations focused on social issues. Apart from providing them with jobs and salaries, Sineo offers to its employees a specially designed social reintegration program, which allows them to find permanent and satisfactory employment at the end of their two year contract with Sineo.

## STRUCTURE

Sineo is a socially responsible enterprise with the status of a social reinsertion company awarded in France. Since May 2006, Sineo has been offering its services through a franchised group of car washing centres in different regions in France. Its first franchise abroad was opened in Brussels in November 2008.

Each franchise is approved as a “social reinsertion company”. The ability to implement the social and environmental goals of the company is among the criteria for the recruitment of each centre’s manager. Sineo also ensures that each center signs the Charter for Respect for the environment. Sineo’s franchises are also expected to ensure and monitor gender equality in their work. All approved centers are regularly monitored in terms of following the principles of Sineo’s work. Sineo employs approximately 350 people in 40 centres in France. Eighty percent of the workforce is employed under an “integration employment contract”.

## ACTIVITIES

The core activities of Sineo involve running waterless car wash services as well as selling biodegradable car cleaning products. These products have been developed by Sineo based on an innovative approach promoted by its founder Olivier Desurmont and in cooperation with chemical laboratories in France. Different products have been designed for each vehicle component – fabrics, body, plastic interiors, wheels, windows, etc. The vegetable- and plant-based products consist entirely of essential oils and natural extracts. They are manufactured through a unique biotechnological process involving the hydrosolubilisation of the essential oils in water.

Since no synthetic materials are used, the cleaning products are 100% biodegradable and dissolve quickly and naturally. Sineo car wash centers do not need water intake, power supply or wastewater drains. The entire car cleaning process uses only 1-5 litres of water, while a traditional car wash requires an average of 150 litres. The prices of Sineo products offered to individual clients range from €5-10. This cost is comparable to other car cleaning brands.

In order to implement its social goal of the reintegration of its beneficiaries into the labour market, Sineo runs a social reinsertion program. This is offered to its employees during their two years of work at Sineo. The program starts with assistance in solving their current problems, i.e. finding accommodation, dealing with ineptness, or gaining necessary job skills like acquiring a driving license. This is managed by an in-house support unit in cooperation with social services and financial institutions (providing things like microcredit), as well as local authorities and communities. The next step is developing a career plan. The Sineo team assists its beneficiaries to define their career objectives. The aim is to find permanent employment in a job chosen by the

employee where they can find satisfaction and an opportunity to develop their potential. Sineo's team helps each employee through the whole process to achieve their goals, with everything from supporting them to gain the skills necessary for their future job to helping rewrite their CV and cover letters. Sineo has also negotiated agreements with large French groups like Auchan, Norauto or the SNCF, thanks to which Sineo's employees can obtain permanent contracts with these companies after their two years with Sineo. In 2012, nearly two-thirds of Sineo's employees were employed on a fixed integration contract, with one-third composed of permanent employees. In 2012, nearly 200 people were in the process of reintegration into a labor market.

The reinsertion program is supported by the State. Sineo's team develops partnerships with local authorities, other public institutions and civil society organisations so that they become part of the reinsertion cycle. The program is based on a few principles, for example career projects should incorporate the company's values, there must be equivalent social and financial targets. Also, the future job must be suitable for this type of reinsertion – flexible, well-managed and requiring few qualifications.

Apart from its core car wash business and implementing the reinsertion program for disadvantaged groups of workers, Sineo is also involved in activities promoting rational use of water and electricity. It has developed comprehensive environmental policies to guide the actions of its employees including strict waste-management and recycling procedures. Sineo also addresses its ecological education actions to its partners and clients. Finally, the company supports research and development in the area of green chemistry in order to widen the range of entirely biodegradable projects available on the market.

## PARTNERS

Sineo invests in business partnerships in order to secure regular clients, enabling the sustainable activities. Among Sineo's partners are some of the world's leading automotive companies such as Renault, Toyota, Opel, Mitsubishi, Peugeot, Ferrari and Porsche.

At the same time, Sineo builds partnerships with institutions and organisations supporting its social reinsertion program. These partnerships involve cooperation regarding the recruitment of employees from disadvantaged groups, as well as providing support to the beneficiaries in their reintegration into the labour market. Sineo's partners in this area are social institutions like PLIE (Plan Local pour l'Insertion et l'Emploi), ANPE (France's National Employment Agency), NGOs, financial institutions that provide funds for reinsertion activities and companies (the future employers of Sineo's beneficiaries, including Auchan, Norauto, SNCF, Koëls).

## CERTIFICATES

As an enterprise engaged for the benefit of the environment, Sineo received the ISO 14001 certificate in February 2007. This norm guarantees that Sineo's environmental management system has been structured according to the highest standards. The internationally patented products of Sineo meet the most demanding environmental criteria and have been granted the EU Ecolabel certificate. This label helps consumers to identify products and services which reduce environmental impact throughout their life cycle, from the extraction of raw material through to production, use and disposal.

## SUCSESSES

Sineo has managed to successfully implement its innovative idea for business, which also has allowed it to fulfill its ambitious social and

environmental goals. Their environmentally friendly car wash service is possible thanks to the creation of biodegradable products, which can be used without water and this has been a fast and huge success in itself. Sineo estimates that while washing a vehicle with their products, one may save 200 litres of water. Sineo annually saves water consumption equivalent to a city of 30,000 inhabitants.

The economic success of Sineo has not only contributed to the development of practical pro-environmental car wash services, but also to wider ecological awareness and work on other environment friendly solutions through further research. It has also enabled systematic support for disadvantaged groups willing to reintegrate into the labour market. During the 10 years of Sineo's social programme, more than 500 people "graduated" from the company within two years to a permanent contract at a job which they have chosen, be it a career in the police, as a family assistant, or as a pet sitter, for example.

Sineo's success was recognised by the European Awards for Environmental Innovation in 2007 and received the Social Entrepreneurs Award in 2008.



## CHALLENGES

Like many other new companies, Sineo also faced the problem of initial capital to enable them to start this innovative business. While creating Sineo, its founder Olivier Desurmont had €7,000 in his pocket. With this amount, it was difficult to establish cooperation with "green" or "vegetable" chemistry laboratories in Europe in order to begin research on the development of biodegradable car washing products. Finally, after a significant number of meetings and lots of energy invested to convince the researchers about Sineo's idea, the enterprise initiated cooperation with a laboratory in the Vosges, the director of which agreed to start research and postpone the fees.

## LESSONS LEARNED

From the beginning, Sineo was an investment in an innovative idea, in the environment and in people. It was not only an investment of funds but also of time.

The car washing business brought its first profit in 2009. Before this, the company had been investing enormously in its development, both in establishing new centers but also in research and development. It also takes time for each new franchises to reach their optimum productivity level.

Finally, it also takes more time than usual for an employee from a vulnerable group to become an efficient worker.

Sineo was prepared for this, since its principal aim was not to maximise profits but to respond to social needs whilst remaining profitable.

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### INTRODUCTION

Sostre Civic is a social enterprise in Spain, created in 2004. It implements and promotes a new approach to accessible housing. It is based on the cooperative model MCU (Modelos de Cooperativas de Uso) which offers decent homes for all sectors of the population and allows people to avoid excessive debt. The homes are also environmentally sustainable. Sostre Civic is an alternative for people who cannot afford to purchase apartments or houses at market prices. The model promoted by Sostre Civic is based on similar solutions developed in Scandinavian countries (Andel Model), Germany (Wohnprojekte) and also in Latin America (FUCVAM in Uruguay). Sostre Civic is introducing this, applying and adapting it to Spanish cultural, legislation and economic-financial systems, in cooperation with relevant public institutions.



### AIM(s)

Sostre Civic aims to improve access to housing in Spain by promoting a housing cooperative model (MCU), to advocate for changes in housing policy and legislation that would make the application of the model easier and, finally, to challenge the general belief in society that dwellings should be privately owned.

The model promoted by Sostre Civic is built on a few basic rules. Firstly, the ownership of the buildings always remains in the hands of the cooperative, but members enjoy the right to indefinite use of the dwelling through a system of minimal rent payments. Secondly, the right to use the dwelling is indefinite, and can be transferred or inherited. Access is acquired through an initial, returnable entry deposit and is sustained with small monthly rent payments. The initial entry deposit is proportional to the characteristics of the accommodation and to people's incomes. The rent payments (which in time decrease rather than increase) are used to repay debts for constructing or restoring the buildings, for maintenance of the dwellings, to pay commonly shared expenses, and to cooperate between the housing cooperatives and its users. Finally, each cooperative unit is created with the intent to last indefinitely and to cooperate with other housing cooperative units in order to replicate the model.

### TARGET GROUP(s)

The main target group of Sostre Civic are its members and potential members of the cooperative, participants in the MCU system. Sostre Civic is open to anyone who is interested in contributing to the organisation with the initial capital and monthly fees in exchange for the right to indefinite use of a home. However, when recruiting members, their social situation is also taken into account. There is large interest in the Sostre Civic housing system. Currently, the organisation's database consists of approximately 1000 of people who are interested in living in an MCU house or apartment. Members of the cooperative have the right to use the property and are involved from the beginning in the design and management of the building. However, if an individual wishes to move, he or she returns the usage rights to the cooperative. The cooperative, according to its statutes, will resell those rights to a new cooperative member.

## STRUCTURE

Sostre Civic includes the Association Sostre Civic and the Sostre Civic Cooperative. The objective of the association is the social and political promotion of a new way of living, including urban planning and a new city model. It cooperates with housing-related public or private organisations that support the ideas behind the MCU model. The association conducts advocacy activities, provides advisory services and organises courses, lectures and seminars.

Finally, the association supports the Sostre Civic Cooperative which is the core structure of the organisation. The Sostre Civic housing cooperative is divided into units in order to manage the cooperative more effectively. Each unit corresponds to a block of flats. This structure is also reflected in the decision making process. The issues specific for each unit are discussed and decided by its members – either when the unit's members assemble or by unit's Board, which is elected by its members and which undertakes ongoing management decisions. Members of the units also delegate representatives to the bodies of the whole cooperative. There is a General Assembly, which decides all matters affecting the cooperative such as the creation of new unit, budget approval, and issues that have an economic influence on more than one unit. There is also a Governing Council, which is a body elected by the members of the whole cooperative and makes decisions concerning the management of the cooperative – agreeing on admission for partners, managing all matters relating to the transmission of usage rights, etc. The Board of each unit and the Governing Council of the cooperative, respectively, may hire a manager for the cooperative, to whom certain tasks can be delegated such as hiring staff to clean the building, executing works, etc. This position would be equivalent to a property manager in other housing communities.

The rules that govern the cooperative are gathered in its Statute, which applies to all members and bodies of Sostre Civic, plus there are Internal Regulations for each particular unit. Members receive copies of these documents when they become partner-users of Sostre Civic.



## ACTIVITIES

The core activity of Sostre Civic is managing, promoting, and advising on housing projects based on the housing cooperative model (MCU). The cooperative obtains housing through new constructions, renovations and conversions of existing buildings. New locations are identified in association with the individuals, family companies, local authorities, banks and agricultural communities. Sostre Civic always tries to arrange it so that the perspective users build or renovate their houses themselves. If this is not possible, it employs subcontractors. These can be different social enterprises or local companies. If a new location is secured by people on the waiting list for a dwelling, they will have priority in joining this project. The dwellings prepared by Sostre Civic are houses with energy saving mechanisms and built with organic and healthy materials. The projects are co-financed by traditional and ethical banks in Spain, as well as by social investors (philanthropic and social venture capital) and through donations.

A good example of Sostre Civic's activities is a project implemented in Barcelona, in one of the most expensive neighborhoods of this city. This was an adaptation of a building which had been vacant for more than 15 years. During this time, it was several times taken over by illegal occupants, its condition was worsening and the owner spent a significant amount on security monitoring. Sostre Civic made him an offer, proposing that the building was placed in the care of the cooperative for 15 years, during which time Sostre Civic would restore it and make it available to its members. Starting in the fourth year of this agreement, Sostre Civic would pay monthly rent to the owner. After 15 years, the contract can be renewed or, if not, Sostre Civic will return the building in good condition in exchange for 80% of the costs of its investment. Six families at risk of exclusion renovated the building, with the support of the cooperative and they continue to live there, paying low rent.

The initiatives of Sostre Civic are possible thanks to the cooperative's members. The process of becoming a member of the MCU housing system involves three stages. A person interested in living in MCU housing first becomes a member of the association and sends an application to Sostre Civic, together with €100 of refundable contribution. From this moment, she or he is registered on the list to be offered a concrete proposal for a housing project.

In the next step, the person becomes a member of the Sostre Civic Cooperative (at first as a "waiting partner" or "expected partner"). The member pays a capital contribution, ranging between €500 and €20,000. The amount depends on the type and standards of the housing project, whether it is a new construction or rehabilitation, in good or worse condition, as well as whether the person is involved in working on the project or not. Regardless, the amount paid is at least nine times lower than the regular cost of a property. This contribution entitles the person to use the

housing and related services from the time of its completion. After paying the contribution, the person is on a waiting list. Finally, when a project is completed and comes into use, the person becomes a full partner of the Sostre Civic cooperative (as a "user partner") and is eligible to use the accommodation.

Apart from implementing housing projects, Sostre Civic activities also involve working with public authorities and other bodies on models for accessible housing, advising on local housing plans as well as projects related to urban planning, housing, the environment and society. Sostre Civic is determined to influence housing policies, including access to land. By launching projects realising the affordable housing model, it uses the already available legislative and financial tools but also increases awareness of the model's benefits and advocates for changes in legislation. Sostre Civic also offers to include in its model partially constructed buildings that local communities or companies cannot sell on the regular market, but which could easily be converted into housing by Sostre Civic. The cooperative also provides consultancy to any person or working party interested in developing MCU projects, self-managed housing, urban sharecropping, ecovillages or building rehabilitation.

## MARKETING

Sostre Civic is using various channels to raise awareness about its activities, as well as to attract possible members and investors. Its projects have been featured on a number of TV programmes and in newspaper articles. Information about the cooperative and its model of providing affordable housing spreads quickly, through internet communication channels as well as traditional word of mouth marketing. Sostre Civic also informs about its projects through its newsletter, distributed among the cooperative's members and to other interested subscribers.

## **PARTNERSHIP(s)**

Sostre Civic and its housing model could develop even further with greater support from the authorities, especially with improved legal and policy conditions. Therefore, Sostre Civic's president Raul Robert continuously advocates at local, regional and national levels to create an enabling environment for the MCU model. Sostre Civic aims at establishing partnership with local and national governments in an effort to have the MCU model included in local housing plans. At the same time, the organisation strives to influence regional regulations to make subsidies and other financial tools available for this model so it could compete in equal conditions with other models, such as renting. To accomplish this, the cooperative mainly cooperates with the Environment and Housing Department of the Autonomous Catalan Government (Generalitat) and of other local governments.

Sostre Civic cooperates with and receives support from various foundations, such as the Ana Bella Foundation which is focused on supporting people at risk of exclusion, especially women who have been abused. The Ana Bella Foundation is a capital contributor and partner of Sostre Civic. Together, they have built supportive housing for women survivors of domestic violence in Extremadura. This pioneering project has been supported by local authorities, who provided land for this purpose. The cooperative also cooperates with enterprises in other relevant sectors such as GestCivic, a social enterprise which provides professional services in architecture and urban planning, engineering and housing management.

## **CERTIFICATES**

Sostre Civic has been granted a certificate for its environmental management system: Eco-Design Standard ISO 14006. The purpose of this is to facilitate the incorporation of environmental management system into the work of the

organisation. This supports efforts to minimise the environmental impact of the activities of Sostre Civic.

Sostre Civic has also been awarded entry to the Network of Solidarity Economy of Catalonia (XES). The Network promotes cooperative work, fair trading, responsible consumption, ethical finance and social currency, sustainability and social solidarity. It supports initiatives that are viable alternatives to the mainstream economy, capable of satisfying the needs of people in a way that is harmonious with the nature. XES is currently comprised of more than fifty organisations.

## **SUCSESSES**

Due to a number of successful projects, the housing model promoted by Sostre Civic has been recognised as a valuable alternative to traditional housing solutions. In particular, the achievements of the organisation were manifested through the recognition of the MCU housing cooperative model in the National Housing Pact and the introduction of the MCU model into the Law on the Right to Housing and the 2009-12 Housing Plan. Another success was also the inclusion of the MCU model in the Master Plan for Housing of the Catalanian Government, thereby making it eligible for all subsidies and support mechanisms already available for rental homes. The activities of Sostre Civic have resulted in providing environmentally sustainable and affordable housing to a number of habitants. FIARE, one of ethical banks functioning in Spain, recognises its value and contributes to the financing of MCU cooperative units. Sostre Civic's entrepreneurship model has also been recognised by the Ashoka Foundation, which awarded Raul Robert an Ashoka Fellowship in 2010. Finally, the organisation has also managed to spread its model of housing by advising more than 15 other groups interested to create of their own cooperative housing initiatives, based on the MCU model.



## CHALLENGES

At the beginning of its activities, Sostre Civic faced a number of difficulties. Some of these were the usual problems of any start up initiative – ensuring funds for the first project, finding its place within the existing housing market, and clashing with the interests of other involved actors. Other issues were more specific to the nature of Sostre Civic's activities. Most problematic was introducing the new model of accessible housing based on cooperative membership into a society where ownership of a house or apartment is the norm. Therefore, Sostre Civic invested a lot of time and energy into raising awareness about the benefits of the housing model it implements. Currently, Raul Robert, the President of Sostre Civic, sees the challenges for his cooperative in securing financing for larger projects with more significant impact. This is particularly difficult in the unfavorable environment of economic crisis and downsizing of public spending, plus competition from real estate developers and agencies. Another challenge identified by Raul Robert is exporting the housing model of Sostre Civic to other countries and persuading governments, banks and other actors that the MCU model is worth supporting.

## LESSONS LEARNED

To those interested in developing a similar housing model, possibly in a different country, Raul Robert advises to use the existing expertise and experience of others. This could start by implementing pilot projects, involving consultations with experienced experts and practitioners.

He stressed the need for a clearly defined purpose of the established initiative and thorough strategic planning, focusing especially on making the created model financially sustainable. Another suggestion is to incorporate in the newly established initiative values beyond accessible housing. Another lesson learned by Sostre Civic is that change is slow, especially when you promote a cooperative housing model in an ownership-

dominated society and work with limited capital. "Be positive when communicating the model to people and show the practical advantages of the model," says Raul Robert.

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**Correspondence interview with Raul Robert, President of Sostre Civic, Founding Partner and Industrial Engineer.**

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### INTRODUCTION

Viewpoint is a research service, primarily by telephone but also conducted online and in-person. Started in 2006 with just two research assistants, this has grown to a team of 14 with offices in three cities in the north of England.

### AIM(s)

Viewpoint's goal is to offer a high quality research service, delivered in an innovative way – by employing people removed from the job market such as the long term unemployed or those with a disability.

### TARGET GROUP(s)

The target groups for Viewpoint are their employees. There are currently three offices, each with a different focus in terms of who they are seeking to employ. In Sheffield, which was the first office, the initial idea was to employ disabled/disadvantaged people, and this evolved to include long-term unemployed. Their second office, in Leeds, employs blind and partially sighted people. The most recent office, in Doncaster, provides opportunities for the long-term unemployed.

### STRUCTURE

Viewpoint has a management team and three research teams. As a Community Interest Company, the proceeds from Viewpoint are reinvested. Legally, they could distribute up to 35% of profits as a dividend to shareholders, but so far this has not happened. The reality is that, in order to develop the business, all profits have been used to develop the business.

### ACTIVITIES

Activities are focused on three areas: tenant satisfaction surveys, public and third sector research, as well as business-to-

business marketing research. Specialising in telephone-based tenant satisfaction questionnaires, Viewpoint works with public housing management providers to capture the views and feedback from tenants in order to assess their work and to help make informed improvements. Topics covered are varied, from assessing repairs and services to complaints and anti-social behavior.



Advising on qualitative and quantitative questionnaire design, Viewpoint provides skilled data collection and provide results either as raw data or as charts with written analysis.

The enterprise also conducts research for public agencies and non-governmental organisations, enabling them to gain an understanding of the needs and opinions of their customers, members or other stakeholders. Undertaking surveys and producing reports, this could be used to evaluate a projects or on-going services, or to get feedback for future plans. Viewpoint's particular understanding of sight loss and wider disability issues, which is uniquely informed by the interviewers' direct experiences, gives them an edge for research that should be accessible to people with disabilities. Another activity is business-to-business marketing. Tailored to meet the requirements of each client, Viewpoint engages in lead generation, creating consumer interest or inquiry into the company's products or services. Increasing awareness of the business, this creates new sales potential through quotation requests and setting appointments.

### **PARTNERSHIP(s)**

Viewpoint's second office was opened in 2009, thanks to an important partnership with the RNIB (Royal National Institute of Blind People). This came about because RNIB were looking for employment opportunities for their clients and were thinking of starting a social enterprise initiative. The RNIB initially approached Viewpoint for fact-finding, but the relationship developed and they decided that it made more sense to work together rather than starting a new business. The office in Leeds employs a team of blind and partially sighted research assistants. Viewpoint was also involved in the SEED (Social Enterprise and Employment Development) project, run by Action for Blind People, which provided work experience placements to visually impaired people. There continue to be temporary placements offered as part of RNIB's Trainee Grade Scheme, which gives unemployed blind and partially sighted people the opportunity to gain some experience in an office environment. This provides valuable paid work and assists them in

looking for permanent employment. In May 2012, Viewpoint opened a third office, resulting from another important partnership. St Leger Homes was already an existing client, and Viewpoint was collecting tenant satisfaction data for their Decent Homes Programme. St Leger wanted to increase the social outcomes from the relationship, looking to bring more benefits to their tenants who were long-term unemployed. Viewpoint and St Leger started this new branch with support from Voluntas MRS, another customer research service company specialising in the social and affordable housing sector. The office in Doncaster has a particular focus on creating new job opportunities for the long term unemployed.

### **CERTIFICATES**

Viewpoint is a registered Community Interest Company. Since 2005, an independent Regulator has been approving and monitoring Community Interest Companies (CIC) in England. Businesses must prove they are established for community purposes and there are regulations to ensure that assets and profits are dedicated to these purposes.

Viewpoint also use the "Positive about disabled people" symbol, which is awarded by Jobcentre Plus (a UK Government agency) to employers who have made commitments to employ, keep and develop the abilities of disabled staff. This relates to recruitment, training, retention, consultation and disability awareness.

Also, Viewpoint promote the fact that they are associate members of the Market Research Society through the Managing Director. This means they comply to the Market Research Society Code of Conduct 2010, and their clients can be assured that all research is completed according to these codes.

## SUCSESSES

In 2009, Viewpoint was named Social Enterprise Start-up of the Year for their region and Managing Director Alistair Ponton was named Social Entrepreneur of the Year 2012. Having started small, the business continues to grow and has successfully expanded to different cities, increasing the services offered and the client base.

One major success for Viewpoint is the development of a simple and supportive structure that allows for long-term unemployed people to re-enter the workplace. By allowing people to work short shifts, just a few days a week, this is psychologically less of a leap for someone who has not been working 8-hour days for a long time. The type of work suits short shift, because with telephone research it is possible to have a productive 3-hour or 5-hour day and in fact it is less tiring, as the work can be repetitive and draining. Individuals have a one-month induction period, but almost immediately they are talking to members of the public, although at first they are not yet expected to achieve targets. They are able to shadow other members of staff, getting tips and increasing their confidence, but as soon as they get over the initial fear of picking up the phone, things seems to get easier. With customer satisfaction surveys – unlike tele-sales – they are mostly talking to members of the public who are happy to share their opinions, so the targets are more achievable. Rather than being a transition organisation that takes long-term unemployed and prepares them for their next “real” job, Viewpoint has achieved a sustainable environment, with little turnover in staff. The company is also realistic about what they expect of their staff. Some research assistants help to prepare the graphs and tables for clients, but the analysis of data and report writing is the responsibility of management. The final reports are shared with the research assistants, which helps to make their job more meaningful, but each person works according to their aptitudes.

## CHALLENGES

When asked about the challenges that Viewpoint has faced, Managing Director Alistair Ponton said, “Everything!” However, he stressed that the difficulties for a social enterprise are generally the same as for any small business. This includes cash flow issues and attracting new clients. In terms of staff, he doesn’t feel employing vulnerable groups has provided any additional problems, since the enterprise was specifically set up for them. “If anything, we are better prepared for staffing issues than other businesses because we know we are employing a (potentially) problematic group.”

Viewpoint is unusual in that they are a relatively small operation. The competitors are usually much larger companies, with many more staff. But, as Alistair Ponton said, “Everyone has to start somewhere. You only need one piece of work to start doing things. It’s just a matter of how you get that first job.” There have been a couple of tenders that were not successful because Viewpoint wasn’t big enough but, generally, size and capacity are not problematic issues for the clients. The company seems to be growing slowly and steadily, instead of trying to be bigger just for the sake of being big.

Being competitive is always a challenge and, in order to price work competitively, this means the profit margins are not large. Unlike regular businesses, Viewpoint does not have to distribute profits; however, just like with any small business, there aren’t major profits anyway. Some jobs do not bring in much profit, but they create employment and keep the staff working. Sometimes, there are opportunities where they can charge more, especially when their expertise with disability brings added value. This provides them with money to reinvest in the company. It’s important to be aware of the different markets and opportunities, to be visible so that clients know you exist, but sometimes success is partially just luck.

## LESSONS LEARNED

Viewpoint's experience has shown that, while the outcomes are different than for a traditional business, it's necessary to do all the same things that any other business must do, learning to survive like they do. Alistair Ponton feels that there is no great mystery to social enterprise. "People want to support you and say nice things about you, but nobody will buy anything from you unless the quality is right."

In terms of being a social economy actor bidding for commercial jobs, Viewpoint's client base started with a contract with Sheffield Homes, who specifically wanted to work with a social enterprise. Viewpoint has generally found that being a social enterprise can be a useful add-on, but that gaining and retaining clients relies on the quality of service and competitive pricing.

### Sources:

Correspondence and interview with Alistair Ponton, Managing Director

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### INTRODUCTION

ViitorPlus is a non-governmental organisation, based in Bucharest, implementing sustainable development projects falling within the following areas: management of natural capital, sustainable production and consumption, education for sustainable development, balanced and harmonious life, and good governance.

The association started in 2006. Teia Gavrilescu (Catană), President of ViitorPlus, said "Our story includes several activities started at that time, but crystallised mostly in 2008. Our first year was more dedicated to analysing and researching Romanian needs, establishing the team and project ideas."

### AIM(s)

ViitorPlus strives to stimulate and contribute to putting in practice the concept of sustainable development at individual, community and organizational level. ViitorPlus promotes the idea that sustainable development integrates in daily life a systemic approach to reality and creates value from the interconnections of environmental, economical and social dimensions that are the basis of human civilisation, in a way that the current generation and future generations can satisfy their needs and maintain opportunities.

The association was established with the aims of creating jobs for people entering the job market, replacing millions of plastic bags a year, and carrying out educational campaigns online and in stores.

### ACTIVITIES

ViitorPlus runs a number of on-going projects to fulfill their aims. One of the most successful projects is the "Adopt a tree!" campaign, which started at the end of 2007 and was inspired by the fact that, during the last half century, Romania

lost half of its forest cover. The main objective of the "Adopt a tree!" campaign is the afforestation of low agricultural fields, and is being achieved by gathering funds from companies and individuals.

From the moment they are planted, the saplings are cared for for five years, which includes the activities of weed removal during summer and other activities of completion during autumn. After five years, the saplings are strong enough to support themselves, but for the next ten years the forest is monitored by Viitorplus. The funds also go towards educational activities that increase the involvement of active donors and local community in planting activities. Thousands of volunteers have been involved with this project, including more than 500 children from two villages in Calarasi county, which has one of the lowest percentage of afforestation in Romania. So far, more than 150,000 saplings have been planted, which represent the equivalent of an area of 24,5 hectares. Additionally, ViitorPlus are involved in dialogue with the government to improve public policies and funding.

For businesses wanting to support this campaign there are a number of options. The company itself can sponsor projects or there are different ways to encourage employees to get involved and to match their contributions. By supporting this campaign, a company receives a number of direct and indirect benefits.





The “Adopt a tree!” campaign has been very successful and has received enormous media attention. For a number of years, it has been the environmental cause of the Raiffeisen Bank Bucharest International Marathon which is organised by the Bucharest Running Club Association and its partners.



by people with social problems, who thus have a work-place insured. These beneficiaries are in a family abandonment prevention programme run by SOS Satele Copiilor Bucharest. They used to be unregistered workers, but now have a legal and stable job that helps them support their families and also offers them the benefit of health insurance.

This project started in 2009 and has been very well received by companies, organisations and residents in the covered areas. So far, more than 200 tonnes of paper and cardboard have been collected.. As a comparison, in Romania less than 2% of waste is selectively collected.



RECICLETA is another of ViitorPlus' important and successful projects, which is the first carbon neutral project in Romania. Based in Bucharest, the main objective is to collect office waste paper for recycling. The paper is transported with cargo-tricycles, unique in Romania, driven



Another key project for ViitorPlus is the Canvas Workshop and was designed in such a way that its business processes are combined with social justice and environmental protection. It aims both to befriend the environment, and to integrate social and vocational training for people with social problems and physical disabilities.

Inspired by the millions of non-biodegradable plastic bags used every year, and the low level of recycling in Romania, the Canvas Workshop provides an environmentally friendly alternative. The main product are canvas bags, made from natural fabric (biodegradable), with a label on recycled paper, printed with water-based paint. Other products include: aprons, vests, phone covers, bracelets, bookmarks, and backpacks. The products are made with care for the environment from untreated cotton or jute, with a nice design and crafted so as to be durable.

There are three employees in the workshop, people with difficulties, who are thus benefiting from a program of socio-professional reinsertion. This is accomplished with the support of Asociația Ateliere Fără Frontiere (Workshops Without Borders Association). By acquiring skills, getting accustomed to a teamwork environment, to the relationship with an employer, and compliance with working rules, they gain the necessary experience to get back into the labor market. Also, part of the Canvas Workshop, there are three people with physical disabilities working from home.



Companies can support the Canvas Workshop either by purchasing bags customised with their logo, or by providing additional funds that can allow the workshop to expand and develop.

In January 2012, the Canvas Workshop was authorised to operate as a protected unit, with home work stations. This is an important recognition as an economic entity whose activity is encouraged by the law regarding disabled people.



## PARTNERSHIPS

ViitorPlus has developed good relationships with partners that support and promote their projects. In addition to a number of companies who support the "Adopt a tree!" campaign, one key partnership is with the Raiffeisen Bank Bucharest International Marathon, which not only brings in money but also raises the profile of the social enterprise considerably.

For the Canvas Workshop, the key partner is Ateliere Fără Frontiere (Workshops Without Borders), a Romanian non-profit association whose purpose is to professionally reinsert people who are experiencing great difficulties. The employees working in the workshop were recruited by Ateliere Fără Frontiere and are under and their professional social assistance.

Each of ViitorPlus' projects are supported by donations and sponsorships from individuals and businesses. Organisational partners include: Antalis Team, AVIS Romania, Bucharest Chamber of Notaries Public, CharityGift.ro, Cami Comexim Ltd, City Compass Romania Platform CSRevolution, and Deneb Romania SRL. Further, ViitorPlus has received important organisational development support from NESsT Romania.

## SUCCESESSES

ViitorPlus is another good example of how social economy is developing in Romania. With a number of successful business partners, this social enterprise is able to maintain a number of on-going projects and has received significant media exposure.

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### INTRODUCTION

EKO School of Life in Wandzin is the largest center for drug and alcohol addicts as well as people with HIV/AIDS. At the same time, it is a well functioning ecological social enterprise with activities that involve breeding native types of rabbits and chickens, growing historical varieties of fruit trees, as well as traditionally processing fruits and vegetables. The farm was created in 1992 on 10 hectares of land in Wandzin, in the north of Poland. The center is located in a 19th century hunting palace which was renovated by the beneficiaries of the EKO School of Life.

### AIM(s)

The primary aim of the EKO School of Life is to create a safe place enabling social integration of addicts, people with HIV/AIDS, and homeless people through treatment (if necessary), training and farm work. In particular, the center aims at developing the skills and increasing the competencies of its beneficiaries, which would allow them to function independently in the society and on the labour market. The EKO School of Life also strives to contribute to the preservation of traditional agriculture, including local breeds of domestic animals and historical varieties of fruit trees. The practical aim of the center is to become financially independent from public institutions and donors.

### TARGET GROUP(s)

The main group targeted by the activities of the EKO School of Life in Wandzin are people threatened with social exclusion, especially those living with HIV/AIDS, addicts and homeless people. The center accommodates around 120 beneficiaries who live and work on the farm. They are also treated and trained there. The center enables beneficiaries to receive treatment and therapy, and also creates opportunities for gaining skills and professional experience which

would be essential when looking for a job on the open labour market. They also have a chance to develop basic competencies such as responsibility, punctuality and reliability, which they often lack. With its activities, the center is also addressing the local farmers, as well as organisations and institutions focusing on the promotion of traditional agriculture. The center provides them with animals and seedlings of plants for further breeding and distribution.

### STRUCTURE

The EKO School of Life in Wandzin was established in 1992 by the association Solidarni PLUS (Solidarity PLUS). In 1996, the association also established a Non-public Healthcare Center (NZOZ) which functions on the grounds of the center and manages the medical and therapeutic assistance provided by the association. It is supported by the National Health Fund (NFZ). The NZOZ enables the treatment of addicts and HIV-positive beneficiaries of the center, and provides a hospice for the AIDS patients. In 2011, the NZOZ was taking care of 50 people with HIV/AIDS and treating 35 drugs addicts and 20 people addicted to alcohol.

The staff of EKO School of Life counts 60 people. This includes administrative employees, medical and therapeutic care, staff, cooks, drivers, gardeners and other farm employees. They live outside of the center, with night duties being covered by nurses and therapists.

The daily life of the beneficiaries at the center is also structured. They are divided into therapeutic groups in which they also work on the farm. Each person has an assigned post and is responsible for his or her specific tasks.

The whole day is filled with work and therapy. The groups meet each morning in order to summarise the previous day and plan the new one. Any arising problems and conflicts are being solved within the groups.

The decisions of each group are taken democratically by their members. All beneficiaries of the center must follow the rules, including a bans on alcohol and drugs plus a strict non-violence rule. Violation of the rules may lead even to expulsion.

The economic activities of the center are managed as charitable work. The beneficiaries working on the farm do not receive salaries. According to the statute of the association, all income is allocated to its statutory activities and in particular to the treatment and training of the beneficiaries.

## **ACTIVITIES**

The first activity of the EKO School of Life, in which 130 beneficiaries were involved, was to renovate the historic hunting palace in which the center is currently located. Today, the main activities of the center involve farm work. In particular, the beneficiaries are involved in breeding chickens and rabbits, gardening as well as taking care of the orchard where they grow traditional varieties of fruit trees, especially apple trees, which are threatened with extinction. The work on the farm also involves the processing and drying of fruit, as well as attending to the biomass heating. The animals and plants are sold and distributed among local farmers, as well as organizations and institutions focusing on the promotion of traditional and ecological agriculture. In this way, the center contributes to the preservation of traditional breeds and varieties.

Apart from its core work on the farm and at the healthcare center, the EKO School of Life undertakes a number of additional activities, which contribute to the treatment and training of the beneficiaries living at the center and others from outside. These activities involve various education programmes as well as therapeutic assistance. Examples of education work involve occupational courses preparing for work as a grower, tiler, electrician or carpenter as well as education

walks during which participants learn about different and rare species of animals and plants living in the region. The therapeutic assistance includes, for example, re-adaptation programs such as "Being a mother" offered to mothers infected with HIV/AIDS . Within the programme there are workshops, therapy and support groups helping pregnant women, mothers and fathers to find themselves in their new roles and to take safe care of children. Another example of this kind of activities is a programme called "Another step forward" which targets former beneficiaries of the center and assists them to find a job through professional counseling and psychotherapy sessions.

Finally, the EKO School of Life is open to students who participate in various education projects, including workshops aimed at preventing addiction, ecological workshops or tree planting actions. Since 1996, the center also has been organising summer camps for children from families threatened with social exclusion.

## **MARKETING**

The EKO School of Life does not invest in specific marketing activities, mainly because of the lack of resources for this kind of service. Still, it presents its activities and products on its website. In addition, the center in Wandzin is visited every year by around 2000 guests, mainly youth taking part in prevention workshops, participants in occupational training programmes, representatives from local authorities as well as from non-governmental organisation in Poland and abroad who come to Wandzin for study visits. This promotion has resulted in establishing cooperation with a number of partners, and helps with the distribution of the centre's products.

## **PARTNERSHIP(s)**

From the very beginning of its existence, the founders of EKO School of Life have been seeking

good cooperation with local authorities and the community. They were not interested in creating an isolated enclave. On the contrary, they wanted the center to be a part of the local community.

The EKO School of Life cooperates with the authorities of the Pomorskie province to organise addiction prevention training for teachers, police, social workers and parents. In cooperation with the Labour Office in Czluchów the center provides permanent or temporary employment for members of the local community. The same institution, together with the Fund for Environmental Protection, supported the center to purchase equipment needed for the farm work (i.e. a tractor and equipment for drying fruit) as well as developing the necessary infrastructure (i.e. the construction of a biomass furnace to heat the center).

The partnerships with local authorities and community is a priority of the center, but it is also involved in cooperation with institutions at the national level. This includes the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, plus other organisations and institutions active in the field of ecological agriculture, drug and alcohol addiction or issues related to HIV/ AIDS. Finally, the EKO School of Life is involved in relations with promoters of social economy such as Ashoka Foundation or UNDP, which support its activities.

## **CERTIFICATES**

In 2008, the EKO School of Life was awarded with a certificate for ecological farming in the fields of animal husbandry, vegetable growing, fruit growing and processing. Certified products from the center can be sold at higher prices and bring more substantial income. One of the products – dandelion syrup – has been registered on the List of Traditional Products by the Ministry of Agriculture.

## **SUCSESSES**

The EKO School of Life has been successful in implementing its social and ecological goals. At the same time, the centre provides invaluable medical and therapeutic assistance to its beneficiaries. Finally, it becomes more and more economically independent thanks to the successful distribution of its products. The EKO School of Life is a unique place, thanks to which people with addictions or HIV/ AIDS can avoid social exclusion, receive assistance in dealing with their problems and hope for better life. The approach of the center of combining treatment with work and training, while also contributing to a higher goal of preserving the environment, has proved to be effective. With these activities, the center created a valuable alternative to other public programmes. Here are some figures to illustrate these successes: since it was established in 1996, the center has provided jobs to 280 beneficiaries as well as members of local community and 300-400 farms have participated in the programme of reviving traditional breeds of animals and varieties of plants. The animals and plants have also been distributed to a number of institutions and organisations promoting ecological farming and social economy.

## **CHALLENGES**

At the beginning, an important challenge for the EKO School of Life was establishing good relations with the local community and in particular overcoming the negative stereotypes about addicts and people with HIV/AIDS. In the 90's, different initiatives aimed at creating centers for people with these problems usually faced resistance from the neighbors. This was also a challenge of EKO School of Life. Therefore, its founders invested a lot of effort into building good relations with the local community and, together with the center's beneficiaries and the local authorities, they engaged in a number of education activities.

Again the stereotypes, a lack of knowledge and professional preparation caused problems for the beneficiaries of the center when accessing medical assistance at local health care facilities.

Finally, the association established its own Non-public Healthcare Center, which takes care of the beneficiaries on a regular basis. Still, despite funds being available, it is not able to find a dentist ready to treat the infected beneficiaries. A current challenge for the center is to gather funds for the modernisation of its buildings, in order to make it accessible for disabled. The center is applying for support of local authorities.

## **LESSONS LEARNED**

When asked for advice, Donat Kuczewski, the President of the Board of the association Solidarity PLUS, stressed that anyone who would like to start a similar initiative should ensure the beneficiaries decent standards of living and work from the very beginning. It is important to be able to bring out the potential of the beneficiaries, to see their talents and passions which they themselves have forgotten about during the years of addiction and social exclusion. It is also a good investment in people, as many of the former beneficiaries of the EKO School of Life are now employees at the center.

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## TIPS FOR SUCCESS

In this section, we have analysed the conversations and information gathered from social enterprises in this guide to present some final commentary. Additional observations have been provided through interviews with experts in the fields of human resources, business development and social economy. Dr. Daria Golebiowska-Tataj is a professor at Warsaw University of Technology Business School, co-founder of Vital Voices Poland, and a member of the Executive Committee of the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) which is based in Budapest in Hungary. Anna Jastrzębska is the Head of Talent Management at PZU, one of Poland's largest employers and one of the largest financial institutions in Central Europe. Edyta Obłąkowska works at the Foundation for Social and Economic Initiatives (FISE) which is currently involved with OWES, the Support Centre for Social Economy, a two-year project providing advice and assistance to existing and new social enterprises in Poland. In an effort to summarise with direct and practical reflection, we focused here on helpful tips worth considering for anyone wanting to start their own social enterprise.

### KNOW WHY YOU EXIST

Don't start a social enterprise just because there is money available. The idea must come from the real needs of the local community and must respond to the requirements of potential customers. Do your research. Undertake thorough market evaluation to make sure there is a clear demand for what you will be doing and to ensure that you are not duplicating activities provided locally. If you find similar organisations in different locations, find out about them in order to learn from their experiences. Dr. Daria Golebiowska-Tataj further underlined that "in order to find your niche, you need to carry out competitive landscape analysis. You might find there's a social need that's very urgent, even undisputable. But that doesn't change the fact that, in a market-driven economy, there may be no funds to fulfill these needs. It's important to understand the the

client and the user, and to distinguish between the two. This distinction between people who pay for the services and people who use them is important, but this is quite often blurred. You have to think how to market the product among paying customers, how to build relationships, and to monitor the track record to show you are efficient and have impact." Knowing why you exist helps to confirm that there is a clear need for your activities, it gives you motivation to get started and to persevere.

### BE A GOOD EMPLOYER

Develop a good team of people. Think carefully about the core members of your social enterprise. Conflicts can arise between people, so it's crucial to start with mutual respect and understanding. Establish your aims and objectives, and create a detailed plan of how to achieve them. Anna Jastrzębska stated that "people sometimes approach things in an ad hoc, intuitional way without a definite strategy or vision. It's important for everyone to have a clear message about how the team should work to accomplish their goals. All the voices can be heard, but at some point it needs to be decided. There needs to be a shared vision, and to say that at least for some time you are not changing your path. It needs to be presented in a responsible and wise way so that everyone knows where you are going as a team and what you need to achieve. First you need to share the big picture, then there is space for ideas and options about how to get there. Each person will have their own responsibilities. It's easier if everyone knows what they want to achieve, to be as concrete as possible and to talk about expectations. This is a way to help people take ownership and be responsible."

In order to create a positive working environment with good conditions, it is essential to seek out assistance. Edyta Obłąkowska explained that, in addition to start-up grants, step-by-step support at the beginning is extremely useful. The OWES

project has been providing workshops to address the issues arising when an enterprise is established, covering topics such as administrative work, finances, and management. Further, new initiatives receive individualised assistance from experts in various areas, who help with things like analysing the idea for economic activities, preparing a statute and other necessary paperwork, and developing a concrete business plan. Dr. Daria Golebiowska-Tataj adds that "motivation must come from the heart. It can't come from outside. But mentoring is important, especially for women and other vulnerable groups. There's a lot of training out there about how to start a business. The knowledge is available, but it's something different for enterprises with a social mission. Mentoring can have a break-through effect for some individuals and it can trigger something in certain people, which enables them to get out there and get things done." Being conscientious and diligent at the initial stage is worth the effort, so that everyone understands exactly what is his/her job and is able to perform tasks well.

### **THINK LIKE A BUSINESS**

Be competitive. You need to provide a unique service or product, and quality should be the top priority in order to survive and thrive on the open market. Edyta Obłokowska confirms that products and services have to be first rate. "The social and environmental aspects are the added value which can be used to promotion social economy, but quality is the most important." She adds that "social enterprises must engage with customers like any business would. They need to have a clear message that is well communicated, presenting the selling points and highlighting what is special about the enterprise and its products or services. And it is important to be consistent in this communication." The OWES project has been providing support for already existing social enterprises, with individualised help with brand development and client relations, as well as advertising and marketing.

Precise financial planning is essential. You need to offer your clients value for money, and you also need to guarantee a constant cash flow. In addition to start-up capital, you will need ongoing investment to ensure growth. It is extremely helpful if core management consists of people with some business background. An enterprise consisting only of people from disadvantage groups has less of a chance for success.

### **BUILD PARTNERSHIPS**

The more connected you are, the better. Becoming integrated into your community will help you find the support you need, as well as clients. Daria Tataj explains that "there is risk involved with starting an enterprise, so it's good to start with a small team who can manage it, and then to invite two or three people to be on a Supervisory Board. These should be people who will help you on a continual basis and who have responsibilities, for example, with accounting or with getting clients. Plus, I would advise to start a Board of Advisors. This can be a much longer list, with 20 or 30 influential people. These are people who will add credibility, supporting you with their names and providing you with advise. This becomes your power net, your social capital. Your Board of Advisors can help with partnerships, which are very important for a small start up. They can open doors for you, so that you can ask other companies to be your media partners or sponsors, to have some kind of barter arrangement, to exchange logos on websites, or they could allocate some money from their CSR budgets."

It is also important for entrepreneurs themselves to share experience and learn from one another. Edyta Obłokowska described how FISE and the OWES project actively support the development of social economy in Poland. Products and services are promoted among perspective clients such as NGOs or local authorities, there is a database

and mapping has been undertaken to identify different kinds of social economy in different regions. These, combined with contests for best enterprises, are generally promoting Polish social economy as well as providing opportunities for the initiatives themselves to network and increase their awareness of one another.

Similarly, fostering relations and cooperation with your local government is highly recommended. Local officers can guide you about incentive programmes, in-kind assistance and possibilities to tender for jobs, plus they connect you to potential customers. Establishing even one solid partnership can make all the difference for your initiative. Look for possibilities of mutual benefit or exchange, and take advantage of opportunities to work together with successful businesses. Building your network takes time and effort, but it will lay the grounds for a sustainable enterprise.

## **PROMOTE YOURSELF**

Identify your audience and reach out to them. Be visible. Even if you don't have a lot of money to spend, develop a clever and ambitious marketing strategy. There are a number of inexpensive promotional channels, especially electronic media. In addition to your own website or blog, it is worthwhile to exchange logos with your partners to increase your online presence. Make sure that people can find you on Facebook, Twitter and other social media sites. Also, getting to know journalists will increase your chances of visibility. Advertising on radio, television and in newspapers is expensive, but if you take part in events and keep a high profile, you will be more likely to be mentioned and your activities can be featured in media discussions. Here again, partnerships are important. You may not have the budget to run and promote a large event, but perhaps one of your clients or the local government can include you in their events.

Don't forget about the strongest and time-tested method – word of mouth promotion. Asking your customers and partners to recommend you is a powerful and effective marketing tool. Edyta Obłąkowska adds that "there definitely are clients for social economy products in Poland. The situation is changing and more and more people care where the things they buy are coming from." FISE undertakes a number of activities to promote social economy and its products and services. For example, it encourages local authorities to support social enterprise initiatives by including social clauses in public procurement. Also, FISE has created a certificate "znak [eS]" which is granted to social enterprises fulfilling a number of economic and social criteria. This is becoming more and more recognised and will be even more widely promoted. Try to obtain the nationally recognised and international certificates that can confirm the quality of your products and services. This is yet another way to build among your customer and to strengthen your position on the market.

## **STAY ALIVE**

Be persistent and don't give up too quickly. Developing a social enterprise takes time. You will need to stay focused to keep things working, but you also need to look at long-term sustainability. Be strategic and think forward. Look for key clients who can help to assure your future with large orders or consistent business. Find a big business partner who will support your development, buying your services or products on a regular basis or providing relevant contacts. Don't rely only on EU grants or support from local authority. Think ahead and make use of your network. Look for potential sponsors, supporters and investors who will be your stakeholders and who will help to expand your activities. A broad portfolio of diverse options can enable your initiative to survive the usual ups and downs of the market and to be less affected by policy changes.

who will help to expand your activities. A broad portfolio of diverse options can enable your initiative to survive the usual ups and downs of the market and to be less affected by policy changes.

Finally, keep an eye on the health and well-being of your team. Running a social enterprise is a great chance for personal growth. Exactly because of this, you need to stay in touch with your workers and to manage relationships. Anna Jastrzębska explains that "you need to periodically look at the assets of your team, and to also identify the challenges and the limitations. Knowing what kind of people you have on your team helps you to see how to share tasks and with this knowledge you can see what more is needed. For example, some people are more systematic, respecting guidelines but less flexible and often need more time to accomplish things. Others are more communicative and full of ideas, but often don't stick to deadlines. But you also need to be open, since people have combinations of tendencies. If you don't allow for people's ambitions and aspirations, if you don't talk with them about how they want to develop and where they want to go, then they won't grow and they could get bored and frustrated. Even when something goes wrong, you need to remember that it happens to everyone. There is always something to be learned. Sometimes people just need confidence and simply saying, "I believe in you" is very powerful.

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## Professionals and Partnerships for Sustainable Social Enterprises

*The market is driven both by people, with their values, needs and aspirations and by organisations, and is a vehicle through which people can act to pursue their aspirations. For this reason, two of the other main instruments of social economy created within the project "Creating and promoting social economy instruments for labour market inclusion of disadvantaged groups" address just these people - professionals and the organisations operating in this field in Romania. For the first, two training standards were created - the social enterprise manager and the social economy specialist. For Romanian organisations operating in the field, particularly for social enterprises established within the project and for their partners, there has been developed a social brand, „MATCA”, representing a management and marketing tool meant to create a favorable space in Romania for their progress.*

*The intention is that the proposed occupations and training standards provide preparation for a sufficiently large number of professionals who, in the long term, are able to create a critical mass necessary in Romania to generate change in organisations and the environment they work in. Here is a brief description of the two occupations and the training standards:*

### **Social Enterprise Manager, COR code 112036**

*A social enterprise manager is a person who administrates an organisation, a specific department or a production facility which aims at economic activities with social goals. In addition to management activities - necessary in any organisation, the standard we developed for Romania envisages social economy specific elements related to the social enterprise mission and objectives, requirements that must be met, the standards and models of good practice in social economy and business social accountability area, to which organisations need to report their activities.*

*According to this occupation's specific*

*requirements, a social enterprise manager performs the following tasks:*

- Strategic and operational planning of the social enterprise
- Organising the social enterprise
- Inclusive management of human resources
- Coordination and monitoring of social enterprise
- Evaluation and reporting of the financial and economic, social and environmental performance of the social enterprise.

### **Social Economy Specialist, COR code 341206**

*This standard describes the activities of the social economy specialist in Romania, which are to be carried out either at the client/organisation's, or at his/her own premises, depending on the contractual relationship between the parties. The person holding this qualification may act as an internal specialist or as an employee of the client, as an external expert or as an individual or authorised person, under a service contract or under other contractual provisions.*

*The social economy specialist's customers may be new or existing social economy organisations or a new organisation starting up in this field.*

*According to the occupation's specific requirements, the social economy specialist performs the following tasks:*

- Advise on social economy
- Advise about operational planning of the organisation working in the social economy field
- Advise on inclusive management of human resources
- Advise the organisation about implementing social economy policies and programmes
- Assessment of public social economy policies.

**„Matca”, a brand aiming to replicate Romanian best practices and to promote social enterprise and their partners in Romania**

Within the project “Creating and promoting social economy instruments for labour market inclusion of disadvantaged groups”, six social enterprises were created in Romania. These were established as craft cooperatives in the villages of Valea Stejarului and Vălenii Lăpuşului in Maramures County, Petrosani town in Hunedoara county, and Iaşi. The cooperatives provide at least 24 jobs for disadvantaged people looking for a job - women over 45, single parents, Roma people and post-institutionalised young people. The businesses operate in different fields: producing clothing, vegetables, aromatic herbs, berries, an organic dry cleaning service and a non-ferrous alloys foundry. How to ensure the sustainability of these cooperatives? How to increase the chances for social enterprises to compete in traditional markets dominated by large manufacturers and retail chains? How to secure a good start, enabling them to find their place on the tumultuous market which is unwelcoming to newcomers? These were questions that informed our approach to developing the „Matca” social brand for Romania.

With the help of Brandient, one of the leading brand consultancy agencies in the country, the „Matca” trademark was created and registered with OSIM, the Romanian Patent Office. The components of the mark - verbal (name and slogan), visual (logo and other graphics), normative and operational (criteria for granting the right to use the brand) - are motivated by values and aspirations such as trust, partnership, responsibility and welfare. Inspired by these values, „Matca” initially encompasses the six cooperatives created within the project, but will also be available to any social enterprise that meets the set of criteria inspired by the social economy principles and, further, will address companies developing long-term business relationships with the cooperatives and having significant contribution to their development.



Two objectives are addressed by this tool. First, it aims to encourage any form of partnership that can ensure sustainable development of social enterprises, in line with community expectations. Second, to the extent that it will build a reputation and gain notoriety, we hope „Matca” to generate social change in the market economy, not only promoting products and organisations, but also values and standards translated into best practices.



