



Social Economy of mothers – good practice from Poland

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Social economy can be an answer to the problems of different groups of women who find themselves outside the labour market. One of such groups are young mothers, who face difficulties in finding employment after having a child and related to it break in their professional career.

Mom's Cooperative – a social economy enterprise founded last year in Warsaw, Poland is a good example of an initiative which provides young mothers with a chance for decent work. The cooperative is producing handcraft inspired by folk art: jewellery, glasses cases, hand bags, pendants and other products of daily use as well as environment friendly toys for children. In order to best fit the taste of variety of clients, the Mom's Cooperative has created several lines of products: Environment friendly line – based on environment friendly and recycled materials, Mothers & children line – based on the useful ideas that moms tested in practice, Popular line – following the fashion styles and Exclusive line – an extravagant style. Each of the products is handmade, with extraordinary thoroughness and attention to details. Often it takes a number of hours to produce one piece of handcraft. All products are unique. The moms value originality.. Moms use the best quality materials for their products, which are certified and come from Polish producers as well as recycled and environment friendly materials.

Mom's cooperative like other social economy enterprises, combines economic and social goals. The Moms declare: 'Our aim is creation of valued and recognized brand. We want our specialty to be unique hand made products of high quality and original design'. With this aspiration they want to fit into a market niche, what would allow them to be successful in economic terms. When designing Mom's Cooperative products they are using their own experience as mothers, which adds value to the goods. Moms are also following current trends offering fashionable accessories as well as environment friendly products. The Mom's Cooperative also offer an opportunity for companies and individual clients to order specially designer occasional products answering their specific interests and needs.

While the economic success is important for all members of the cooperative, at the same time they aim at activation of women at risk of marginalization both in society and in the labour market. They focus on single, underage, permanently unemployed mothers and support cooperation between them. The profits that the mom's Cooperative will bring will

be allocated to the improvement of qualifications of its members as well as ensuring sustainability of the enterprise. When they will have larger surpluses at their disposal, Moms plan to allocate them to support other women who are interested in developing their own social economy initiatives.

Moms plan to support other women in the future, in a way they were supported by various partners. The idea of the Mom's Cooperative came from the employees of Orbis (Polish touristic company) who also contributed to the cooperative through volunteer work. Financial support was provided by Accor (international hotel company) which supports similar projects in other countries. Finally, the Mom's Cooperative was established and initially coordinated by Mama Foundation (women's NGO supporting mothers and their rights). The Mom's Cooperative is in fact, an outcome of a project conducted by Mama Foundation. As a part of this project a group of 12 women who were mothers were offered a training and practical support in establishing their own social enterprise. The moms who took part in the project came from different backgrounds. They were unemployed, some of them were single mothers, a few had problems with returning to work after a break related to having a child. The focus of the training program was placed on their cooperation, personal development and support in achieving economic security and independence. The preparatory trainings involved: psychological workshop (aimed at integration of the group, motivation and establishing of common goals), art and occupational (handcraft training, inspiration through visits to museums and heritage parks) and last but not least, business formation (trainings in business plan preparation, administration and management of social enterprise).

The support by Orbis, Accord and Fundacja Mama has continued after the preparation period. Orbis became a client of the Mom's Cooperative and Accor will support the distribution of Mom's products in its hotels. The Mom's Cooperative also designed a special line of products for foreign guests of the hotels of Accor, where the products are available for sale. When established, the Mom's Cooperative received institutional support from Employment Office as well as counseling assistance from Center for Support of Social Economy Initiatives. In addition the support in a form of art consultations is provided by Museum of Ethnography.

Currently Mom's Cooperative has two main units: creative department and sales department. Other tasks are divided between all members, all of them also work in production. There is a President and v-ce president of the cooperative as well as 3 person board. The structure will most probably change soon and the roles of each member will be more specialized.

The Cooperative is developing, it has recently opened an internet store at www.spoldzielniamam.pl. The mom's present their products and idea of social enterprise at various events related to the socially responsible business initiatives. They become more and more recognizable and count on a success of their initiative.

Based on the articles on the interview with a President of Mom's Cooperative: Małgorzata Falis and websites: spoldzielniamam.pl, fundacjamama.pl