

ERASMUS+ Programme 2015 – KA2 Adult Education

Project n°: 2015-1-ES01-KA204-015937

Document name: **Interviewing entrepreneurial women - Cyprus**

Partner: Cyprus Adult Education Association – Syndesmos Ekpedevsis Enilikon Kyprou (CAEA)

Author: Klitos Symeonides

**Employment and Women on the 21st century in Europe: From Household economy to SME economy (Small and Medium enterprises) – MUPYME Project**

**INTERVIEWING ENTREPRENEURIAL WOMEN**

**POLIVIA (GOURI)**

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The interview took place at her small business where her house is also situated, on Saturday the 27th February.

I will follow the 29 questions and points I have received from FEUP which are grouped in 5 categories.

The identification, the beginning, the consolidation, the future, the enterprising woman.



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## 1. The identification

Polivia lives in a village located in the low mountains named Gouri with 300 villagers, 40 kilometres from the capital Nicosia. It is a picturesque village with traditional economy, with many farmers, it is very green, with some of the villagers to have family business for tourism oriented as many tourist are visiting the village.

Polivia has 4 children, the oldest is 28 years old and the youngest 17 years old. She also has 2 grandchildren. She is 50 years old.

The small family business produced frozen pasta (Ravioli, lasagna, kanelloni etc) and fresh cocktail -snacks products like olive cakes, cheese cakes, vegetable marrow cakes, meat cakes, mpougatsa.

Polivia is full time worker and owner, her husband is doing the distribution-delivery of products, after she employed two part timers when she has orders. Two of the 4 children are studying cooking and they help when it's needed.

She started to do some of the products at her house in 1997 in her kitchen. She was combining household activities with business activities. In 2000 she expanded her house with an extra room which became the place of the business but she didn't get the license for the establishment of the small business until 2004.

Polivia delivers her product at 15 supermarkets in the region near Gouri (area with 5000 citizens) and also to some selected supermarkets in the capital, Nicosia, which is about 30 kilometres from Gouri.

## 2. The beginning

**2.1** In 1997 the business started at home at the kitchen. In 2000 a separate room was built and in 2004 this room was expanded and another room was added. Official license for the small business was given at 2004. 60% of equipment cost was given from European Union funds.

**2.2** An officer from the Agricultural Department of developing women enterprises was the main person who persuaded her to establish a business. The officer was visiting the village gathering a group of women advising on household economy, on hygiene issues, on how to preserve local products-fruits etc. The officer was also giving private assistance.

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**2.3** She was working at barbecue place and later at a bakery shop before 1997. She has learned a lot observing how the work was done, how the bills and finances were done, how the marketing was promoting, calculation issues, etc. This was another basic element for her decision to establish the business.

**2.4** She developed her skills by Learning by Doing. At the beginning she had to face many problems:

- She was working at the house's kitchen
- She had no equipment ( She commended: The equipment make the good worker)
- Poor marketing
- Higher risk was needed.
- Space was small
- Purchases at small quantities resulting into more expensive products
- Small market no mass production, the cost was higher

**2.5** Family was very supportive, husband and children were helping

The Ministry of Agriculture, responsible for women in enterprise, was advising Polivia

Also other friends were encouraging her to continue. At that time some other women of the village started small scale homework businesses and this was encouraging her.

**2.6** Her strong character and commitment, some inner qualities such as consistency and responsibility oriented, were very helpful at the beginning to build the necessary trust. Gradually some supermarkets trusted her products and they were purchasing in large quantities. This was limiting the cost of Polivia's products. At this stage other colleagues and friends were very helpful to make contacts.

**2.7** The most important decision was to expand the business and to move from her kitchen to a separate room attached to her house. With all this she was able to buy equipment, tools and materials. She would not like to move far from home because of children. She was very happy with this, with her husband and children, because even though she was running a business she was near children and husband.

### **3. The consolidation**

**3.1** Polivia believes that the most important quality to maintain the project was her consistency, to be on time in all her activities, the quality of her products and the quality of

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materials she was using, the enrichment with new machinery and equipment, all the above resulting to a high standard trust.

**3.2** The future success was determined by the purchases of modern machinery and equipment and most important by the use of new methods and techniques which were acquired by experience, self-learning and exchange of ideas. Another important factor for success was that the business was following the fashion and the preferences of the population; it was flexible regarding changes, matched to the traditions of the villages and to the area concerning type of products, etc.

**3.3** The purchases of the right machinery and equipment on time was delayed the progress of the company. Also another important tissue delaying the progress was the mobility problem meaning the best way to deliver the products. Could not buy a car for delivering the products and until today have no special car for delivery using their private car. Another problem for the consolidation process was the electricity problem which was expensive. When there was electricity cut, it was a serious problem.

**3.4** The most important decision was to expand the business gradually first to build a room and later to expand this room adding a second one and now there are two rooms with all facilities. Now there are all necessary refrigerators to support the business.

**3.5** The most crucial issue which a business person should anticipate is to have continuously electrical power. Polivia managed to have it as she created a generator, so there is electricity cut, the generator provides the necessary electricity.

## 4. The future

**4.1** There are no plans for expansion unless one of her two children, who are cooks, decides to work for the company.

**4.2** The quality of the products, the responsible way of treating clients, the services offered to the clients are determining factors affecting the future. If one of the children decides to undertake, new ideas will be introduced in the company-education which is very important for a business. Children are professional cooks and have high education.

**4.3** There is strong will for expansion and cover many areas and not a small region as happen today. There is a dynamic of the company, people trust the product but all depend on the

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human resources. Polivia cannot expand it further unless if a son decide to work for the company.

**4.4.** No changes at the moment. Nowadays there is economic crisis in Cyprus which is under memorandum. Even if people like the products and trust the company some cannot cover their obligation and delay in doing this. Also there is a competition where large companies sell the same products in lower prices.

**4.5** The new phase will follow the preferences of the population. For example people are no crazy for Sugar designs, for confectionery art, cake costing, couture cakes, cookie canvas, cupcakes, biscuits sweets etc. At this moment a company oriented to the confectionery art will be successful.

## **5. Enterprising women**

**5.1** The work that Polivia is doing is sensitive and she says it is ideal for a woman. Needs sensitivity, caring of clients, delivery on time, consistency and quality. The progressive nature of the village, due to the establishment in 1975 of the Adult Education Centre of the Ministry of Education, was a corner stone for the women in the village to come out of the household and join actively the social life, the activities, the interest on common issues, the interest to start thinking that they are equal to men and that are able to do something for the progress of their families and their community.

**5.2** She is in charge of the management, husband is doing the delivery. During household life she has learned a lot, so this has been transferred to the business. Her village is famous because of the traditional food and Polivia received from parents the love for that kind of food. She was trying to cook the traditional food and learned some skills. Also seeing others in the village, adding the training from the Agricultural Department was able to acquired skills in managing the business. Decision making and taking responsibilities were at high levels.

**5.3** The main thing was the emancipation of women in the village due to the Adult Centre and the training from the Ministry of Agriculture. Empowerment of women in the village was significant. This gave Polovia the power to move to the small business, feeling strong enough. The work at the business was close to her household preserving the traditional food. With 4 children in their care she has learned many skills and knowledge of how to run a small at the beginning business. She has learned how to cook in the most economical way, using local products, growing vegetables etc. She has learned at high level house economy.

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**5.4** Polivia likes to modernize the household experiences by documenting the activities , the expenses , the plans, to keep income –expenses, to keep records of children progress, to keep health documents, to keep a diary but due to lack of time this happen accidentally and through experience. Most households in Cyprus keep a deposit in the bank for the future; this is mainly the man’s responsibility.

**5.5** Lately most women are starting to undertake a company. Polivia is a dynamic person dynamic with a strong personality and determination. Polivia believes that women are effective in certain kinds of business like the food production where her business is oriented. Also she is good at preserving certain kinds of agricultural products like fruits, milk products and meat products. She believes that women are better than men. They have many skills acquired from household even they are hidden and shadowed many times. Women have many qualities related to women nature and character.

**5.6** Polivia says that the first value and quality is consistency , trust, sensitivity, time management, advance services, quality, skills for planning, organizing, for deciding, risk taking when is necessary strong personality , far from stereotypes, , financial knowledge, study of the market, marketing skills, etc.

**5.7** The most important factors are to take risks, to take decisions, to respect people, to command the time, to have determination and initiative. It is also very important to have a strong personality, skills and knowledge, to study the market, to have management skills and to be a sensitive person.