

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

Interviewing Entrepreneurial Women

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Industry: Architecture, building and furniture design

Introductory Message

Entrepreneurship in its nature is not only a creative but a communicative action, too. Keeping this in mind, the DAFNI KEK staff within the MUPYME project were in search of those women entrepreneurs not only speak but COMMUNICATING effectively their vision behind their decision to become entrepreneurs – considering also that this decision keeps them active in several roles in parallel, the role of mother, of wife or partner.

Besides the focus objective of the task of interviewing “to bring light to the routes and lives as are perceived by the entrepreneurs themselves” in order to learn and get inspired by them, we were in serious consideration what exactly role model of entrepreneur we wanted to promote –especially considering the time of crisis and the various deficits the target group of housewives are facing daily.

Keeping in mind the profile of the housewives (age, location, educational background, personal and social status) we decided to reach to those entrepreneurs who are not far from the selected housewives’ cultural and educational background, or even in age terms.

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After the prior research in our context of reference (Achaia Prefecture, mainly in Patras area) and taking into account the dominate job industries of the city, we came in contact with the first 5 of the about 15 women entrepreneurs found.

The identification

Elena is a young architect who was employed in Athens working for a big architectural office. In 2014, realizing her needs of self discovery and one's own creations, she decided to leave her previous job and a good salary and return to Patras – the place where she grew up – and with a friend and colleague they made their very own start up operating within the fields of architectural, interior, lighting and product design.

After meeting her twice before the interview, and the second time being in the presence of her colleague- Thanos- , we arranged the interview's date and time. An interview that was quite an interesting one too with an essence of a youthful enthusiasm and optimism despite the difficulties of risk in words spoken from a young creator – 30+ years old .

Location

Patras, Capital of Western Greece. Points of reference: the Main industry is Services. Due to connection directly via Port with rest of Europe, the citizens are influenced by all trends and despite the economic crisis the fashion market is very competitive and pluralistic. Dubbed as Greece's *Gate to the West*, Patras is a commercial hub, while its busy port is a nodal point for trade and communication with Italy and the rest of [Western Europe](#).

A quick view in this [Wikipedia article](#) will give you an insight of the city's relation with architecture. The last few years we witnessed several changes in the city's structure, especially outside the center of the city, notably by the creation of the new port as well as the creation of a seaside promenade that connects the old port

with the new, which also resembles (a little) the one of Thessaloniki. Also, the last decade there have been many studies by students of the Architecture and Civil Engineering schools of the University of Patras as well as several similar departments from the Technological Institute of Patras, concerning the reuse and restoration of old, deserted factories and old buildings (in general) throughout Achaia region.

The beginning

As it has already been referred Elena had studied Architecture and is talented in her field. She is actively concerned on making the daily life of her and the people around her aesthetical, simple and functional. This is the concept behind her work: Simplicity with direct reference to the identified need and materials adapted to the specified environment and function.

This was the stimulus idea: To create by reflecting the needs of the people who are in search of making their life easier, beautiful, respecting the contemporary rhythms, and their impression on creation itself, and what that demands in an environment already overwhelming, the environment of a modern city.

She announced her decision to her ex employer who reacted with enthusiasm for her courage to do it despite his dislike of parting with a qualified and talented coworker. But, after all, what is the meaning of progress in life if not to support youth in making their own plans and broaden their horizons.

In this decision she was not alone: her family was supportive. In order to manage with the cost of a new workplace, both she and her colleague made the decision. Elena & Thanos, both of them architects, started their own business environment

‘We are not really business people - at least I don’t feel like that... we don’t even understand what means and what it practically reflects... Every day, from the very beginning you are in front of a challenge which you need to overcome in

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bureaucratical terms in order to continue your creative production and marketing job...’

From the very beginning of the new office they had a strong understanding of what we refer to as brandname: they wanted to promote their own identity and make it easy for people to understand /distinguish their work from that of others. This was their general principle: **IDENTITY**

The second principle was **OPENESS** in creations – not abiding by the stereotype which wants architects to be the ones who design houses, interior or exterior surroundings and in cooperation with civil engineers are responsible for the development of buildings (private or public). “We are responding to any question which inspires us, bigger or small respecting any aspect of life”

Elena together with Thanos decided to respond to any need someone addresses them - from a simple maintenance work to suggestions on furniture, etc.

The third principle was **Client Centered**: to create upon demand and special preferences, listening carefully to what the clients need and trying to formulate this need and question into a practical object. **Make each of the part a personalized object designed only for them**

The fourth principle is **Understanding** the experts in reference to your work: In order to materialize an idea - further to designing it on paper or computer - you need those experts /craftsmen to make it real. So you need to find a common language and understanding with carpenters, electricians, blacksmiths etc.

The fifth principle was **Visual Strategy and Self Marketing** of the creations: Make your setting functional and beautiful by designing your personalized furniture, light sources, etc

And one more principle is **Continuous Learning**: This is a way to keep your enthusiasm despite the risk taking or any difficulties of the daily running of an enterprise or economic deficits

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The consolidation

Elena & Thanos created a very interesting attitude in their workplace. They had worked a lot before developing it by simulating their place virtually. They had a clear idea of what they wanted to do. And how to promote practically and directly their works to their clients – as part of their own way of living. So they really created their own place based on their own designs – following their own principles and modeling this approach themselves.

Each one of the furniture – desk, chairs, etc – are designed by recycled materials or natural ones regarding their needs and in accordance to the environment

They have established their network of experts who transfer the designs from paper to the correspondent material, wood, iron etc.

They give time to their clients to describe, analyze and express their vision in any need they have – it is a way to communicate, to relate with them and satisfy both; the aesthetical and functional aspect of the products.

Their business skills were developed mostly through practice... but they were open to learn to understand and operate in a complex environment which demands them to be alert all time.

The future

It is not possible to say that we are positive and make our plans depending on the needs that arise. In any case we make our plans step by step. And each step is a new lesson and a new point of reflection.

We try to keep our principles as indispensable of our brand – in a combination of the how and what the client perceives as most compatible to his/her needs.

We are also volunteering to make people learn what they need: it is difficult to express what they keep in mind, they don't really formulate their general idea, clarify exactly what they like. Our role is to support them in understanding and in such a way to make them feel sure for their decisions.

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We love what we are doing, we love our job, we love people and we want to contribute to their happiness and sense of uniqueness with no extra cost.

Despite the economic crisis, we are positive that a new age is coming, a shift happens towards more sustainable, human size related solutions – and we are of the pioneers of this new age!!

Messages to keep

- Love your work
- Update your knowledge
- Listen carefully to your clients
- Learn to cooperate with the experts of reference – necessary to implement / finish what you have started
- Learn to communicate in empathy
- Marketing is psychology
- Keep your enthusiasm strong despite the challenges: Believe in change
- Business can be learned in road – depends on how dedicated you are and how clear your aim is to you



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