

ERASMUS+ Programme 2015 – KA2 Adult Education
Project n°: 2015-1-ES01-KA204-015937
Document name: Interviewing entrepreneurial women
Partner: Università Popolare di Firenze, UPF, ITALY
Author: Cristina Demartis

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

INTERVIEWING ENTREPRENEURIAL WOMEN

Gilda Gradi – Firenze-Italy



Reviewed by: Cristina Demartis

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Identification

Gilda is a historical restaurateur in a popular area of Firenze, known for its originality in the management of the restaurant and costumers. Her restaurant “da Gilda” is open for 16 years and is in the square of the S. Ambrogio market, where we can find another 50 restaurants.

Her first challenge has been to withstand the competition of Italian and foreigner’s restaurants, pizzerias, fast food that in the last years have proliferated in the historical center of Firenze and, at the same time, to offer something different from other “eateries”.

The interview takes place in the early morning in the space Gilda, 65 years old, manages with her son, 40, and 5 employees. She is specialized in Tuscan cuisine, with a particular passion for medieval food, learned by her mother.



The space is cozy and very accurate. But the true characteristic is her open mind that combines the dinner to theater, book readings, artistic events and meetings among friends so that the restaurant has become a familiar place where to meet before and after the cinema and the theater to talk about movies, comedy, literature and holidays to be.

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During the interview the regulars enter and leave and ask for the "usual", seat, read the newspaper, talk with known and even with strangers.

Beginning

Before opening her restaurant, Gilda has worked 20 years in two other restaurants as an employee, and there is where she learned her trade, and she understood how to move in the dining in a difficult and demanding area such as Florence.

She always loved the restaurant industry, the kitchen and the relationship with the clients. With them she has a relationship of friendship and almost of kinship.

To open her own business has been complicated for all the bureaucratic issues and Italian high taxation of restaurants. Her independent spirit made her deal with management problems by relying on experts but also learning by herself.

Be separated and have a child gave her the determination to face risks and business investment, and with satisfaction, given that now the son works with her in the restaurant.

Consolidation

So, it was her family that has motivated the creation of her own businesses. Her passion for the work she did and how she did it allowed her to go on, and her nose has enabled Gilda to create a niche for herself, with a vintage-liberty style, and customers fond of her, and also foreigners curious of typical and medieval Tuscan cuisine.

Managing a business in Florence means having secure competitors and tax liability, but the instinct of Gilda has always helped her to understand the market demand and to rely, where appropriate, to outside to address economic and financial issues.

If from the beginning he had more support and information for the start of the activity, from the Municipality or from traders' associations, it would have been certainly more simple to start working in catering.

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The Future

Gilda feels that she started a small business all thanks to her passion, will and innate skills as restaurateur; basically having fun, hard working up to 18 hours a day, taking care of everything, from the choice of the menu foods, the layout of the room the reception of clients etc, but performs an activity that she likes and that is creative and profitable and where she can work with her son. And this is a great satisfaction for her.

She wants to continue working in this way, taking care of the customers that are the reason the local is successful with their neighborhood tam-tam, and now, with their feedback on tripadvisor. She knows that much of the success of the location depends on her but also on the external environment, the tourism and the general economic well-being of clients, which, hopefully, will not diminish.

Enterprising women

Gilda does not think there are differences between women entrepreneurs and men entrepreneurs, looking at her son who serves clients and who has relationships with skill and kindness.

But then she says that courtesy and women determination were crucial to start her own business. Also her passion for creative cuisine and a willingness to learn from her mother helped her to develop creativity and interpersonal skills, curiosity and gumption.

She has managed to reconcile private life with the profession, creating a family business that allows her to stay in the family and work.

She highly recommends to housewives to browse, learn about the different international cuisines, read, update, take courses and study niches still available for catering, such as “reuse of food” and sustainable creative dishes.

At h.12.00 foreign customers begin to arrive and Gilda asks me, politely, if the interview is over because she has to work ...