

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**

**Bianca Belardinelli – Firenze – Italy**



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## The identification

The interview takes place in the “Cuccumeo bookshop”, held by Bianca, and starts before opening time. She is preparing one room in the shop, to show a book for teenagers, together with a treasure hunt for kids. Just come back from a primary school, where she goes to promote readings to the students.

The shop is cozy, colorful and amusing, open 6 years ago in a residential area with no bookshops. Its showcase looks on a street with a lot of traffic, near to a school, and people pass by on the purpose to give a look to the composition of dolls, books and games Bianca changes every week.

Our interview is continuously interrupted by the students, entering the shop to buy educational books, recommended books or gifts, or only to touch puppets and lab educational materials. Parents ask advices on the book to buy so that Bianca has to be an organizer, a merchant, an interior designer and also an adviser. She is 43, very dynamic and smiling to everybody, including who enters with a dripping umbrella or an ice-cream.



Reviewed by: Cristina Demartis

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With a degree in history of art she has worked in libraries and in publishing. When the economic crisis has stricken every sector, but in particular Culture and publishing, her contract has expired and she decided to open the bookshop together with two colleagues, met in an association promoting reading and both having gone through the same experiences. So, they have created a partnership of 3 partners and founded “Cuccumeo Bookshop”, specialized in books and events for adolescents. It's a district library, different from the chains of libraries having a monopoly on books in Firenze, town of traditions in the field of books and Publishers. It is specialized in books for teenagers, education labs for students and teachers, as well as events. In the shop exhibitions are organized, training projects, with schools and public and private institutions, a presentation of books together with the Authors, dinners where books are read. They have created day by day a meeting point and a place of support for the district, which needed such a place.

### **The beginning**

It's the first entrepreneurship for Bianca, not experienced in commerce but only in publishing. At the beginning it was very hard, both for the economic crisis not in favor of the birth of small shops and because she was not an expert. Carrying on her enterprise as an entrepreneur, therefore the administrative side, that of keeping the accounts and the marketing one had to be done on top of the usual work for the bookshop, and they were totally to be learned.

Even if the three members were young and women, they did not get any support from the State for the startup of their firm. So they had to ask for credit to a Bank, giving it as guarantee the basic idea of their business and their expertise in the subject. Decisive factors to start up their library, according to the 3 partners, have been: the experience in publishing and in education; to be unemployed in spite of their qualification; the expertise accumulated in the years and their passion for popularizing reading.

All the difficulties encountered have been overcome on the job: from marketing to accounts, to making costumers. They have learned “on their skin” the techniques and methods necessary for working in high competition with the big bookshops and the e-commerce. With a part of self-training, a part of Internet, by communication within colleagues and by a bit of experience they have gained the missing abilities.

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## **Consolidation**

After the initial effort to start the bookshop up, to find costumers and to create her own characteristics, to be distinguished from others, Bianca has realized it to be finally “her” work, the work meeting her requirements, where she feels qualified, in such as it combines all her cultural, artistic, relational and didactic qualities to reach what she wanted. This is so also thanks to her associated in the job and its ups and downs. It was necessary to learn quickly what she didn't know how to do, improve her skills, learn how to deal with the costumers.

Bianca advises those who want to open a bookshop and think it's enough to be acquainted with the world of books only, to follow a course on bookkeeping and finances.

When having problems, Bianca and partners succeeded to resist, to take decisions in the most difficult moments and to go on and communicate with colleagues of the field.

## **The future**

The future, for Bianca, is not clear; she has the need of renovate herself and of reorganizing some parts of the shop to develop activities while reducing efforts and coasts. To be on her own activity gives her a good energy, but she is in need of an external support, from the town council or the councilors for Culture, for cultural events connected with books, to stimulate the need of Culture, to raise reading, as is done in other municipalities of Italy.

Her future is linked to the context and to the trend of the market; therefore she feels she has to continue to innovate and to keep herself up-to date, to preview the trend of the market. She should like to rethink the structure of the bookshop and to relaunch activities of events and lab for young and adults. More time is needed to keep herself informed, and to know of financial supports and of the laws ruling her field.

It would be necessary a foreseeing capacity, non-stopping to daily problems and going further, besides to seeing far should be pleasing, according to her.

## **Enterprising women**

With this job Bianca succeeded to fulfill her passions: creative window-dresser, designer and reader. Due to the time spent in the bookshop not only during opening time, but also for organizing events, setting ups and formation, time left for her private life is little.

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Domestic economy helped her to handle the commercial part and to balance the account, but on the other side it was a restraint to her entrepreneurship: so, the grip on reality of housework curbs her from doing big steps and from taking a risk.

But from housekeeping she also got a “creative chaos”, the ability of handling unforeseen events, the use of creativity in practical occasions, an expertise which reveals useful in the daily handling of the activities, but also in overcoming difficulties. She has realized that it's always time to invent new activities, also in association with others, to optimize your own resources.

According to Bianca, female firms devote major attention to people and to relationships, if compared to male firms. The first ones are more flexible and adjust better to finding new solutions, are more “resistant” and resilient when there is a crisis.

What is needed to be entrepreneur is a great willpower, to resist, to be determined, independent, to have a sensation of risk, the will to innovate and change, creativity. But also being irrational, because all can change in a minute, despite the best previews and planning.

The interview ends at closing time of the shop.