

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**

**Barbara Livolsi – Firenze-Italy**



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## Identification

Barbara Livolsi is a business woman of 56 years who has been director for 20 years of a Language Center for foreigners, updated as Training Agency for Italians and European Center of mobility for teachers.

Her School “Europass, Centro Studi Europeo” has 12 collaborators and provides traditional courses of Italian for foreigners, but also courses of cooking, history of art, music, video techniques, teaching methods for young and adults.

She has opened the school in the nineties, when Firenze was one of the most appealing Italian towns for foreigners, especially young, who come for long periods to study Italian, art and culture. Today in Florence there are approximately 50 language schools for foreigners, competition is high and especially during the crisis of 2001 and 2008 the decline of foreigners was felt, putting tourism and allied activities on its knees.

Over the 20 years clients have changed; residence times have reduced, students come from all over the world, are of all ages and more asking than before.

Spite all that, Barbara resisted, boosting her school during the most critical times, inventing new strategies and new costumers, organizing the school openly and democratically.

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## Beginning

Barbara graduates in languages and is teaching Italian in Germany for 2 years. Back to Italy she feels that teaching Italian is her passion and buys a little school in Firenze together with her mother, who deals with the administration, and a partner to share the first expenses. She did not apply to Banks, for fear of debts; in 1997 and 2010 only, in the decline of work, she asked for little bank loans, to boost the image of the school, remake her website, the graphics of catalogs and educational materials. Difficulties were not in the beginning, then, but later, in the last years. Events happened that marked her, pushing her to invest in her idea of enterprise. Separation from mother, husband and partner, detachments anyhow that made her grow.

She realized to have to make some choices and to transform her business into a company. So she takes the regional certification to become Training Agency and adopts quality certification for the school to conform to market standards. This way she feels she came out of her personal experience to become legal subject.

## Consolidation

Her personal growth was determining to invest in the School of Languages. She realized to have to open to Europe, to innovate and to experiment new targets. At the same time she was enhancing other passions, like counseling and sport and was involved in her family. She listens always to advices of colleagues and friends, questioning and matching also with competitors. She has become member of an association of schools for foreigners.

During the 2008 crisis she has invested in European exchanges, not only of students, but also of teachers and adults, opening courses of education and training according to European standards. Therefore Barbara has been updating and rising her competences, widening her horizons and investing on her collaborators, on their ideas of new formulas of teaching foreigners, new technologies applied to teaching and more sophisticated marketing.

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## **The Future**

In the future Barbara would like to develop new areas and services accredited with Tuscan Region, to invest in people and in smart collaborators, since the company is well established and the quality of a school is linked to good collaborators.

She is aware that the future depends not only on her, but also on her collaborators and on the external context, on the crisis of tourism and on the type of travelers.

She should like to develop a new important sector, housing for students, evaluating investments for buying also flats, so as to offer full packages of study-holiday and the accommodation.

That's the investment of a true entrepreneur, she says.

## **Enterprising women**

The path followed by Barbara has shown qualities and characteristics of a woman, determined in following her ideas. But also use of soft skills, that is transverse skills, like the ability in choosing her collaborators in the time of difficulties and her democracy and behavior peer-to-peer with the school employees she questions with, taking decisions with them.

She says that she has learned to work as a housekeeper, needing to organize, due to the fact that the house is like a little firm.

Women should be more conscious of their skills, do training and do not be afraid to realize their abilities. Women know how to do things and have the practical sense, it's all in beginning.

Then, we have to develop our soft skills, doing experience, training and work with others in a mutual exchange.