

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

Donatella Cinelli Colombini –Siena – Italy



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Identification

Donatella Cinelli Colombini, 63, a degree in modern literature and history of art, is entrepreneur of two companies in Siena, Tuscany: a farm and a farmhouse, where 33 employees work, wine technicians, accountants, vintners, winemakers, chefs, waiters and clerks.

Married, one daughter, her family members too work in the firm.

After the age of 40, having inherited some good wine, abandoned land and ruins in the Chiantishire to be restored, she began her entrepreneurial activities; within 2 decades she succeeds in producing again optimum wine, Brunello, with a market, 68% directed abroad.

She restructures the ruins turning them into a farm, with restaurants and craft shops, wellness room, but also cooking classes and tasting courses of the wines produced from her vineyards.

It was not easy to interview her, because Donatella is a successful entrepreneur traveling all the time, diversifying her interests between supervision of products, new marketing strategies and public relations in Italy and abroad. Enthusiastic and full of initiative, she doesn't escape our interview even with broken ribs. A steel entrepreneur.



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Beginning.

She began her entrepreneurial experience in 1998, when she wanted to restructure the vineyards and create a farmhouse. She sold some parts of the land and asked the loans in the Bank where strictly sent her husband, knowing that she, as a woman, would not be taken into account by the banking system.

Approaching the world of wine, she has noticed that this area too was male: the greatest winemakers, commissions of wine juries and the wine trade were all in the hands of men.

After inheriting a small wine cellar of Brunello from her mother, she wanted to revive the indigenous variety trying experts who would study the quality of her wine. Asking a higher technical school of oenology, the answer was that the best wine makers were males, all busy and not available; she has asked then to be allowed to do the job interviews to women graduates in the same school, and she found skills and capabilities in them.

She thus created a whole team of women with even the winemaker woman giving it the name "Casato first women." Which was a success, both for quality and for marketing.

In the nineties she was also Head of Tourism in Siena and among other activities also had a stroke of genius. The few wineries producing wine in the city were closed to the public. And Donatella has invented the "cellars open to the public", to which she associated the idea of wine tourism. In this way, the producers are open to the sales coming in direct contact with the consumers.

The main difficulties were not at the beginning of the activity, but during the crisis of 2008 and during the scandals of counterfeit Brunello which have affected the quality of the wines. Despite her phases she has understood that by diversifying production, not only wine, but also local crafts, cooking classes and wine, spa in the countryside, farm, awards to women that have distinguished themselves in socially relevant activities.

She considers herself lucky, having always been possible for her to count on the help of family, friends and networks to which she belonged.

Her company has always been characterized for a cut in the feminine, for the promotion of local products, the workmanship, the products customization.

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Consolidation

In the consolidation phase of the company it was fundamental to have courage. Among the competition, the crisis and the wine scams, it took courage to continue operations, so Donatella was focused on three priorities: to continue to grow not to be crushed; to diversify sectors, not only wine but also catering, ceramics in three different locations, local crafts; to invest in communication, in particular in social media. For these reasons, thanks also to the experts advices, decided to invest in new technologies in the field of wine making. She would need more time to follow and manage her activities at the best.

The future

Donatella believes that the future depends very much on the "country system". In Italy actually we do the work twice as our neighbors because we have no efficient services such as connecting roads, fast wifi, water pipes ... So much depends on how structures that facilitate or hinder entrepreneurship are handled. She argues that it would take a Ministry of Tourism at the central level with legislative powers and that Regions should manage locally this field so important for Italy, enhancing local products, communication and marketing. In order to obtain a change, the individual entrepreneur should focus on his specific skills, but it's also the country system that needs to change. Now, she is focusing on technologies and media communication, in order to improve the quality products and reach young and foreign targets.

Enterprising women.

Entrepreneurship of Donatella showed a great organizational and planning skill that partly comes from domestic experience and from intuition and feminine sensibility that led her to work with women and enhance their work and their characteristics. Of her female business she has managed to make a resource, distinguishing herself from other companies even in times of economic crisis.

The advice she gives is the same she has been following: to network, do not be alone, associate, enter the clubs and especially develop the ability to plan, organize, meet deadlines and give yourself a working method. The specific skills, intuition and courage, will do the rest.