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Short Community Wisdom Stories for Community Empowerment and Inspiration - Gordana Rodic

Project title:

“Building International Bridges – Social Entrepreneurship as a Tool for Local Economic Empowerment”



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- in loving memory of Tomasz Sadowski -

FOREWORD

This brochure is designed to depict various short stories on how we as municipalities, civic society organizations, social enterprises and citizens can start community actions that will leave a mark long after we are gone, for the generations to come after us.

The brochure is put together in honour of a great visionary Tomasz Sadowski, who was a co-founder of the Barka Foundation from Poland and who strongly believed in community empowerment and support through social entrepreneurship, where we all sow small seeds of good deeds and solidarity that will grow from our local actions.

Below, is an excerpt from a short metaphorical story shared by one of his daughters, Ewa Sadowska, who remembers his philosophical approach to life, reflecting his vision regarding community empowerment in Poland and globally:

Tomek always sowed something....

In Chudobczyce, he planted a vineyard.

He used to say that vineyards are like olive groves – they last forever. He used to grow tomatoes and herbs in the greenhouse, and at home, he would put all kinds of vegetables and fruits in pots, saying that everything you sow, you can see blossom.

He would often say to us: "Walk in the vineyard, but walk slowly, talk to the bushes, and they will grow better."

Those wise words of Tomasz were not only meant to give practical instructions on plant growing, but were rather meant as simple life lessons.

His words had a much deeper meaning, sending us a message of inspiration, hope, motivation but also giving a sense of responsibility for each individual on how to plant the seeds of solidarity in their local communities, showing that, when we all practice solidarity and mutual respect, people will blossom, when given attention, care and a sense of returned dignity.

We hope that these short from Poland, Macedonia and Czech Republic about citizens without IDs, former female prisoners, the homeless, people who have no hearing, Roma communities will inspire municipalities, associations, students, workers and others to start their own local actions that will bring positive changes in the lives of others.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank to our partners the Barka Foundation, Krobia municipality, ART Zagroda from Poland, SIEC, Ljubeznost, Misla and hotel Daljan from Macedonia and Diakonina Sleska from the Czech Republic for sharing their stories that might be inspiration to others.

Also, we would like to thank to all our partners from Poland, Macedonia, Hungary, Czech Republic and Slovakia who took part in this significant part of the Visegrad Fund supported project called:

"Building International Bridges – Social Entrepreneurship as a Tool for Local Economic Empowerment".

Above all, we are thankful to the Visegrad Fund for their continuous support and for recognizing the value of our work, our devotion and dedication to the cause of building bridges between Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, Czech Republic in Macedonia and spreading the words of wisdom about importance of using social entrepreneurship as a tool for socio-economic integration and empowerment of our citizens.

For giving us moral and technical support along the way, we are grateful to the Jupiter company from Macedonia who participated in technically shaping this brochure and the International Solidarity Economy Network website, (<https://eusolidarityeconomy.info>) designed to promote the work of the partners in this project and our efforts in inspiring others for more social entrepreneurship actions, to better the world around us and make it a more positive place for all.

BARKA POLAND

Barbara Sadowska – A Beam of Hope

Excerpts from our lives

“There's no end to the absurd things people will do trying to make life mean something.”
— William Wharton, *Birdy*

He would often say, *"Rush, rush. rush. You're always going somewhere. Where's the reflection? Where is the answer to the question: where are we at this point, where are the others? What kind of world are we living in? From what and from whom can we not turn our eyes away?"*

Tomek Sadowski was an incredible, smart, and passionate-for-life man. There was a culture of certain responsibility and constant analysis of life situations. Not everyone understood his visions at the time. Sometimes, people even fell asleep while sitting around the table, listening to the endless, visionary stories of my late husband.

His high level of intuition enabled him to see the "Barka" Mutual Help Foundation in a broad social, economic, and ecological context. He was able to thoroughly analyse the elements that were missing to build and develop a solidary, social economy, which in practice meant a just, solidary society and a chance for a good life for everyone. Tomek was so courageous to dream of building future self-sustainable communities focusing on social justice and including social and economic security. With time, this has grown to be our common life mission.

In such an important matter for us, as Tomek said, we must be able to talk to everyone, regardless of political beliefs. So, we started talks with governments, successive ministers, health care institutions, and businesses. We talked to them about what we learned in our discussions with those who live on the streets.

In Poland, the tradition of cooperatives dates back to the 19th century. It developed most dynamically in the interwar period - the Act on Cooperatives of 1920 was considered one of the best-structured legal acts in this area. In the Second Polish Republic, every fifth Pole was a member of some cooperative.

It had a lot to do with an upbringing in the idea of the common good, brotherhood, and social friendship. However, the thriving cooperative system was interrupted by the World War II. In the times of the Polish People's Republic, cooperatives were subject to state authorities, which meant that people did not identify with their activities, and the image of cooperatives changed for the worse. All this was a huge challenge, especially after 1989 which was the period of the "Barka" Foundation for Mutual Aid initial development stages.

Tomek smartly realized that this was the time of the new order in Poland generating huge groups of people who were not prepared for job competition, in the free market. Those who learned to work in a different reality and were used to the old order were unable to adapt to large corporations with a completely different management model.

The pace of work, the need to react quickly, many expectations from superiors in various fields, and a working system in which it is not enough to perform one activity well - all this was an insurmountable challenge for many citizens. For example, in state-owned firms, men were used to having one job, performed practically throughout the course of life. When such a reality changed, actions were needed to help transition from one system to another, which we nowadays call solidarity management or social economy. For us, this help meant giving strength and power, which was envisaged as a mutual process.

Barka's idea for the revision of the so-called rigid capitalism was received differently. The world reacted differently to our ideas. When mass trips to work abroad began, Tomek Sadowski was aware that the vast majority of the people were not prepared for a new life in the West, and that new life dramas were coming their way. He was aware that changing surroundings would be too difficult. He told people in the community that we would bring Polish sisters and brothers back from the West. People then started wondering themselves: *Where will going to the West bring us?*

Years passed. As a Baka co-founder, I was given the role of conducting interviews with the directors of social care centers, where there was a widespread belief that people never change. That if they drank, they will drink. If they didn't have a job, they won't have a job. If they were bad, they will be bad. I stubbornly asked them the same questions over and over again: *Do we choose where we are born? Is it our fault that we grew up in such hopelessness?*

Contact with the prisoners in the prison in Rawicz, where I was an intern, provided me with many blessings in the form of life lessons. Often during conversations, I asked the question: "*Why are you here?*". People shared deep and painful memories with me. One of the inmates said that his father beat him when he did not bring vodka and that he had no preconditions for a normal childhood, for doing his homework. His stepfather used to bring men to his own wife to pay for sex, so that there would be enough for vodka. Additionally, the man grew up in an environment where people always stole and, if he did not want to steal, he was punished. As an adult, he was sent to prison for such thefts.

Obviously, he and many other men were born into families where they had no chance to externalize themselves, to internalize family patterns and social norms. He was only taught how to steal, lie, and scheme. These were the patterns that he drew from his small environment, there were no other opinions. In prison, during our conversations, he asked me once: "*Where can I find hope for starting a new life?*".

Going back to my childhood memories I can remember that, ever since I was a child, I wanted to be a missionary. Ever since I can remember, I have always had fun helping people. I would take eggs from our henhouse and take them to my neighbour so that she would have something to eat.

My parents were the war generation. Father was a partisan, he was active in the ranks of the Home Army, then in the National Armed Forces, he was in prison for it. My mother, on the other hand, was a nurse. I grew up in a traditional family in which people were at the centre of high values of life, connected to solidarity and supporting others.

Our house was always open for guests, catering to a variety of people, and cherishing cordiality. That is probably why I have always been so drawn to a humanistic approach to life, to connections and warm relations between people. Later, when I became a psychologist, I felt my vocation very strongly, and never took it lightly. Meeting Tomek Sadowski made it possible for me to fulfil my life calling, following the path of my soul and believing in mutual help and support to others.

Before we met, I worked in a psychiatric hospital in Kościan. It was there that I learned about people's challenging life stories, their illnesses, and suffering, I saw how deeply misunderstood they were. Boguś Zienkiewicz, one of the doctors, seeing my inclination to immerse myself in people's stories and their experiences, and my alternative approach combining various methods of treatment, thereby using art, suggested that I should meet a revolutionary psychologist Tomek Sadowski who was opening a day support centre in Poznań for the mentally ill.

Boguś insisted that I absolutely had to work in the centre because hospitals usually treat people mainly with high doses of drugs, so all my effort to implement humanistic psychology would not bring such effects, where space for real people's development was being provided. I found out that the innovative centre was looking for psychologists. So, I went to the first meeting for a job interview.

Based on the Boguś Zienkiewicz's story, I imagined Tomek Sadowski as a super handsome man, and Tomuś appeared to be less than I imagined, at the first glance. However, when we started talking, I was totally impressed by his vision, his immense energy and great passion to fight for his beliefs.

Already during the first meeting, we realized that we have the same aligned approach to humanistic psychology, about the fact that there must be a better approach to psychiatry, so as not to reduce the effects of the disease only through medicines. He decided to hire me – and so we started working with a group of 14 other psychologists. We did everything as a group, together, as a family. We cleaned, cooked and led a normal life with people who had been in psychiatric hospitals. I was intrigued by our approach to therapy. I do not think anyone in my life had previously fascinated me as much as Tomek.

There was a lot of rejection behind all our activities. Until 1991, we were employees of the Care Helath Centre. One day, the director came to us and announced that there was a reduction in jobs in the health service, and what we were doing was not in line with the idea of the system. So, they fired us.

It was a very difficult time for me. We were left with no means of subsistence, no pay, no insurance. Poverty was screaming. I did not expect it to be so hard. I cried many times. The psychologists said we had betrayed our profession, that we had moved in with people who needed help, and that it was no rehabilitation. They mocked us, asked if rehabilitation was supposed to be that we peel potatoes together, collect currants, and sell them on the market.

Just try to imagine the following picture for a moment – we were in the middle of the massive job redundancy of the 90s Poland, with a family and no jobs. Losing jobs was hard for us, but even harder was the fact that all our mentally ill patients suddenly became homeless and had no place to go. As a family with 2 small daughters, both jobless, we made a crucial decision in our lives and chose to create support for our family and the patients too.

My family said they did not want this life for me. They decided that such a choice was a tragedy, after all, I was a graduated psychologist, so they wondered what I was doing with my life, by cooking dinners for the poor. They worried that eventually, various institutions will take my children away from me, because we have nothing to live on. They did not understand that even if we did not have anything to live from for a while, we had a lot to live for...

For the first nine years we lived in Władysławowo, 70 km west of Poznań. It was the first community in which we developed principles that were the basis for the development of the entire subsequent system of Barka's operation, i.e. building a culture of solidarity, interpersonal and social relations based on mutual assistance.

In Władysławowo, we were in the same situation as everyone who came there. Together, we created a home situated in the abandoned buildings of the old village school. We lived with 40 people, making a living from vegetable production, on about three hectares of land. In order to survive, we worked for the local farmers. Sometimes we helped them, and they supported us in return, through a barter system, by giving us occasionally a duck or a pig.

There was also a wonderful parish priest who told the villagers about us, saying that what we do is an extraordinary thing, that the former school has become a place where people rebuild their dignity and get a new life. His support meant a lot to us in terms of community integration. So, the locals were willing to teach us farming, growing tomatoes and other skills. Someone gave us vegetable seedlings, and others bought us oranges. Thanks to the individual relations, we made a living and could survive.

A decade after our start, we began to be more widely recognized, even appreciated with awards. Not for a single day, not for a single moment have we stepped back in our mission, not even after 33 years of Barka's existence. Our activities are a confirmation that people can get back on their feet, that they can make a complete transformation, rehabilitation and healing of their lives. We are aware that such changes are impossible while people need to wait in a social welfare queue or when living in overcrowded homeless shelters.

The difficulty of our approach lies precisely in the fact that in the initial phase, we have to invest a lot of intellectual capital, build a network of stakeholders (community key figures, mayors, local employers) and a space where people can live and work with dignity, i.e. express themselves. It is difficult because on the other side there are systems with benefits, i.e. passive social policy, which is extremely costly for the state. In this

format, difficult stories still have their course, they never end or there is a minimal chance for change in a person.

After so many years. we still promote empowerment through self-determination and independence. At some point, people go to work, they can support themselves and become self-sufficient. They cover the costs of living, but the most important thing is that they stay sober, free themselves from addictions, thanks to which they are socially prepared to function. They can start a family, put their dream into reality, live their lives.

And as we accept people stricken by the Ukraine war, we truly can see how much partnerships, solidarity, community and trust mean. God is graceful. If there are at least a few people working for solidarity in our environment, the entire society changes.

By following our original path of solidarity and humanistic approach to life which was started by our dear Tomek, we follow our inner wisdom and we continue doing all the absurd things to make each other's lives meaningful and our ideas shine like a beam of light to many....

KROBIA POLAND

The role of the Municipal and Communal Social Welfare Center in Krobia and its innovative tools in the socio-professional reintegration of the long-term unemployed

Important institutions from the environment of social economy entities include social welfare institutions (OPS, PCPR, ROPS). They are responsible for shaping social policy at individual levels of local government and for its implementation.

OPS and PCPR clients are people who are of interest to social economy entities - people in a difficult life situation who are unable to overcome it using their own resources and capabilities. These institutions are an important partner of the social enterprises - they can use social economy as a tool for solving social problems and activating socially excluded people.

Powiat family assistance centers as well as regional social policy centers may also commission social economy entities to perform public tasks. Local or regional governments may also support social economy entities in a material, non-financial form, e.g. local governments also have funds to support the institutional development of non-governmental organizations and social cooperatives and are the main causes of social exclusion, thanks to which residents apply for assistance from the social assistance system.

Unemployment affects the life and functioning of the whole family, it can be a source of problems and pathologies. As the period of unemployment continues, these problems grow and give rise to new ones, such as frustration, isolation, alcoholism, helplessness in life. The increase in the number of people affected by the phenomenon of social exclusion causes an increase in the number of tasks in the field of social assistance and an increase in the pool of expenses for providing assistance. Such a situation also necessitates the adaptation of existing forms of activity to new needs. Since the possibilities of the state and local government budgets are limited, social work, which takes various forms, becomes of fundamental importance.

Social workers are the closest to human problems, difficulties and crises on a daily basis. They try to professionally help the beneficiaries of the social welfare center in solving life difficulties. The main goal of our work is to make people independent and reintegrate them with the environment. The main problem of all aid institutions is the fact that they focus primarily on the implementation of care functions, which leads mainly to dependence on social assistance benefits, learned helplessness. The center where we work tries to introduce new forms of assistance, which are to activate people using assistance, lead to their independence, so that they can overcome life's difficulties and find their place on the labor market, in everyday life, in the local community.

We recognize, however, that much needs to change in our institution so that it can better implement the assumptions of the social economy. First of all, the approach of people using the center's help to the forms of help offered should be changed. It is necessary to change from a passive to an active attitude. Emphasis should also be placed on environmental activities. It is necessary to support not only the individual, but above all the local community.

The idea of social solidarity should be "vaccinated", making people realize that the strength lies in the community. From this point of view, social workers initiate the creation of self-help groups and promote volunteering. The education of socially excluded people in the field of social economy and encouraging them to participate in the CIS are also of great importance.

An important element is also providing the entire local community with information on the social economy, creating an educational base related to establishing, running and managing its entities, promoting products and services of social economy entities in local and regional media.

Another positive element influencing the development of the social market economy in our unit is the continuous education of social workers. Knowledge about social economy must be constantly deepened and upgraded. Therefore, consultation and information meetings, study visits and workshops are necessary. Thanks to the cooperation with CIS, the percentage of people using the center's help due to unemployment has decreased. People referred to CIS not only found employment there, but thanks to social reintegration they acquired interpersonal skills, learned to fulfill the social roles entrusted to them, their sense of responsibility increased and their self-esteem increased.

An important point that significantly affects the development of the social economy is building a network of cooperation and local partnerships in our poviat. Partnerships are supported by the benefits that result from joint action both from the point of view of the goals of cooperation and due to the individual interest of the partners.

It is also important to increase the knowledge of entrepreneurs operating in the commune in the field of corporate social responsibility and the involvement of companies in the creation and development of social enterprises.

Summing up, we can say that the development of the social economy is a new, extremely interesting instrument of social assistance and social work. The center's social workers play a key role, as it is up to them to stimulate the active behavior of socially excluded people. Equipped with appropriate knowledge and skills, they will be able to initiate and support activities aimed at creating new structures of the social economy with the participation of previously excluded groups and communities.

Partnerships for the social economy in the Gostyń District

The initiator of the partnership in the Gostyń District was the previous Mayor of Krobi, Sebastian Czwojda, and the former manager of the Municipal and Communal Social Welfare Center in Krobi, Anna Krzyżostaniak. The commune has recognized the opportunities offered by the social economy in terms of eliminating the phenomenon of social exclusion, creating new jobs and activating local communities. The establishment of a local partnership in the Gostyń poviat was preceded by a series of meetings in social economy entities operating in the poviat, study visits to other regions of Wielkopolska, in order to gain knowledge about the functioning of social economy entities at the "neighbors".

September 11, 2013 On May 10, 2018, in the Hall of the Poviat Starosty in Gostyń, an agreement on cooperation for the development of a social market economy in the Gostyń Poviat was solemnly signed. The

beneficiaries of the agreement are the inhabitants of the Gostyński Powiat, in particular the unemployed, including the disabled, in particularly difficult life situations.

The overriding objective of the social agreement is the cooperation of the local community and the rebuilding of social trust. The agreement is also aimed at initiating and coordinating activities aimed at building a lasting partnership of entities operating in the Gostyński Powiat, such as local government administration, entrepreneurs, civic organizations and other entities acting to prevent social exclusion and reduce unemployment through the development of social economy institutions. The agreement covers activities related to defining areas of exclusion in the powiat, the state and dynamics of the local labor market and revealing its main problems and areas requiring improvement.

As part of cooperation with the BARKA Mutual Help Foundation, representatives of the partnership had the opportunity to get acquainted with social economy entities operating in Great Britain and Germany. An internship was also organized "Social Integration Centres" at the "Barka" Foundation for Mutual Help, during which the participants gained the knowledge and skills necessary to help in setting up and advising social market economy institutions emerging on the Polish market. Currently, the Municipal and Commune Social Welfare Center in Krobia, in cooperation with BARKA, is implementing *the Social Economy Without Borders project*, under which representatives of our partnership will have the opportunity to make study visits to Macedonia, the Czech Republic and Hungary to learn about the state of the social economy there. At this point, I would like to mention that in September, the municipality of Krobia hosted a delegation from Macedonia, because our partnership is considered a role model when it comes to the social market economy.

The local partnership in the Gostyń powiat is very active in searching for new forms of social and professional activation and reintegration of long-term unemployed people who use social assistance benefits. Local partners cooperated in establishing CIS and social cooperatives, which enable building a new quality of life for people in life difficulties and for the local community.

Activities of selected social economy entities operating in the Gostyn Powiat

Social cooperatives "Kamerdyner" and ECOSS operating in Krobia

Cooperative activity is the most characteristic form of social economy. Cooperatives conduct economic activities on the basis of economic calculations while providing benefits to cooperative members. The subject of activities of a social cooperative, in accordance with the Act, is running a joint enterprise based on the personal work of its members, while at the same time acting for the professional and social reintegration of its members, treated as a cooperative's statutory activity, and not economic activity.

A social cooperative may be established by natural persons, as well as non-governmental organizations, local government units and church legal persons. If the founders of the cooperative are legal persons, two founders are sufficient. The founders are required to employ at least five persons from disadvantaged groups in the cooperative, and these persons are entitled to become members of the cooperative after 12 months of continuous employment with the cooperative.

The idea of creating a Social Cooperative was born in the Krobski Social Welfare Center during workshops for the long-term unemployed. A group of active and entrepreneurial people who want to take matters into their own hands has been created. They decided to start their own social enterprise. It was possible thanks to the help of the Poviát Labor Office, the Social Welfare Centre, local authorities, the Association for Supporting Entrepreneurship of the Gostyń District and the Association for Social Cooperatives in Poznań. The assumption of the cooperative was to support its members and give satisfaction to customers by providing services of the highest quality.

Spółdzielnia Socialna Kamerdyner provides mainly catering services professionally serving organized name days, birthdays, anniversaries, engagement, wedding and communion parties.

The "Kamerdyner" social cooperative took part in the project announced as part of the project entitled "New opening of the OWSS - financial support for social cooperatives" co-financed by the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy under the Civic Initiatives Fund. As part of the project, series of lectures and workshops were organized on a balanced diet, healthy cooking and creative decoration of dishes and tables. The Cooperative's project was called "Appetite for Health". The implementation of "Appetite for Health" was the Cooperative's contribution to preventive health care and consumer education in the Krobia commune. The project was addressed to the Country Housewives' Clubs operating in the Krobia Commune and was implemented from November 2011 to May 2012 in village halls.

The main objective of the project was increasing awareness of healthy eating, which was achieved through the implementation of specific objectives, including familiarizing project participants with the principles of healthy eating, improving skills in the preparation of valuable and low-calorie dishes, decorating dishes and tables, and integrating members of the Circles of Country Housewives of the Krobia Commune.

Like most cooperatives in our country, this one also encounters problems. These are mainly financial problems related to the insufficient number of orders for services provided by the cooperative. Cooperation between cooperatives and local self-governments – commune and poviát – is very important. "Kamerdyner" is supported by such institutions. Initially, the cooperative had staffing problems that lasted until the current composition of the company's members crystallized.

Talking to the president of the cooperative, one can notice an enthusiastic look at the future of the company. Mrs. Ewa Śmigiel, the president of the board, hopes that the cooperative will win more orders by participating in tenders and, of course, winning them.

Social Cooperative "ECOSS" is one of the first ones in Poland, which was established by two legal entities at different levels of local government administration, namely the Krobia Commune and the Gostyński District. In 2013, they established the Cooperative, which successfully operates in the municipal and road industry ¹. At the beginning of 2018, another entity of the local government administration joined the Cooperative - the Krzywiń Commune.

¹Resolution of the City Council in Krobia of June 27, 2012 on the establishment of the Ecosystem Social Cooperative in Krobia
Resolution of the Gostyński Poviát Council of June 28, 2012 on the establishment of the Ecosystem Social Cooperative in starch

The activities carried out by the Cooperative combine the professionalism of economic activity with the achievement of superior, individual social goals. The cooperative is a social enterprise, which allocates the profits earned to achieve the goals of social and professional reintegration. The Cooperative's policy defined in this way is shaped by people who, by engaging their potential, skills and experience, work on continuous development and improvement of the quality of services provided.

The staff of the Cooperative consists of former employees of the "Remontowa Group", operating at the City Hall in Krobia and the Poviát Road Administration in Gostyń, and the Department of Technical Services of the City and Commune Office in Krzywiń, as well as people who were long-term unemployed. Thanks to the activities of the Cooperative, they got a chance to return to the labor market and the possibility of social and professional activation.

Currently, the ECOSS Social Cooperative has over 24 employees, specialists in many industries and fields. It is also a modern machine park, which includes: a CAT backhoe loader, a set for winter road maintenance, (gritters and snow plows), municipal mowers with high unloading (Iseki, John Deere), flail mowers, road sweeper, equipment for felling and utilization of trees and a number of other types of equipment, allowing to carry out even the most specialized orders.

During its activity, the Ecosocial Cooperative has completed many different projects commissioned by several dozen clients, including: the following municipalities: Krobia, Kobylin, Borek Wielkopolski; Gostyński District, as well as such enterprises as: Acciona, WIX- Filteron , Gaz-System SA, Chod -Drog, Hodowla Plant Smolice.

The portfolio of services includes:

- construction of pedestrian routes and roads as well as car parks made of cobblestones;
- construction of field roads made of articulated concrete slabs;
- construction of rainwater and sanitary sewage systems;
- hardening of the terrain, making foundations;
- earthworks with a backhoe loader and transport of excavated material, removal of rubble;
- panel fencing;
- construction and renovation work;
- road repairs with cold mass, grit and sprinkler;
- felling and mowing roadsides;
- establishing and maintaining urban green areas;

- industrial mowing of green areas along with grass collection and disposal;
- pruning and felling of trees with disposal;
- fascination of reservoirs and watercourses;
- manual and mechanical sweeping of roads and pavements, cleaning of drains;
- winter maintenance of roads, sidewalks and other areas (sanding, salting, manual and mechanical snow removal);
- rental of a professional panel stage with a roof measuring 6x8 m;
- other municipal services.

At this point, it is worth noting that the Krobia Commune grants In- house contracts to Ecosocial Cooperative. This is the model found on the market. The legal possibility is used to outsource tasks to subsidiaries, instead of awarding contracts on the open market, in competitive procedures provided for in the Public Procurement Law.

Activity of the "Arka" Social Cooperative in Gostyń

On October 10, 2012, the "Arka" Social Cooperative was entered into the National Court Register. It started its activity on November 2, 2012.

Its main activity is to help the society, especially people with a low social status; the elderly; sick; children and young people, families and women.

The establishment of a Social Cooperative as an innovative legal form of social economy is to help achieve these goals by conducting social and socially useful activities.

The activities of the Social Cooperative have been divided into the following departments:

- I. Therapeutic and psychological help:
 1. Therapeutic services in the field of: eating disorders (anorexia, bulimia), therapy and support for oncological patients, long-term and chronically ill and their families.
 2. Conducting workshops and psychoeducation for school students in the field of communication, self-esteem, interpersonal training, etc.
 3. Socio-social consulting.
- II. Services to the public:
 - 1) House cleaning, traditional, seasonal, after renovation, washing windows.
 - 2) Cleaning for institutions.
 - 3) Shopping.
 - 4) Care for people, the elderly, the sick, the disabled, including:
 - short-term, e.g. family departure;
 - help with daily activities;

- accompanying during walks;
- shopping;
- assistance in reaching the doctor, office, hairdresser, beautician;
- care of graves.

III. Tax, business and accounting consultancy.

Arka cooperative employs unemployed people who have guaranteed financial support from the District Labor Office, while in formal and organizational matters, the cooperative can count on the assistance of the Association for Social Cooperatives from the beginning of its activity. Arka also has its strong supporters among representatives of local governments, as it is very actively involved in activities for the benefit of the local community. At the moment, Arka employs 60 people, which is related to the provision of care services by the cooperative - some of them under an employment contract, some under a contract of mandate. However, these are not full working hours, because this is the nature of care. The cooperative employs several people with the status of a disabled person.

The president of the social cooperative, Mrs. Dorota Piotrowska, made sure that each person employed in the company entered it with their own baggage of experience and could fulfill themselves in the areas in which they are good.

According to the President's account, the difficulties in the functioning of the cooperative are related to the ignorance of the society, which results in the fact that it is difficult for some initiatives to exist. There are difficulties with such reasoning that cooperation with a cooperative may mean that it functions on someone's budget. This is the problem that needs to be tackled with education. Another thing is tenders and the Public Procurement Act. All members of the cooperative are waiting impatiently for any changes. It is likely that something will change in the Public Procurement Act, perhaps it will be easier to apply social clauses and win tenders more easily. When it comes to successes, for the employees of the Ark, success is the mere fact that the years of their activity exist and pass. *"It is not always easy, because liquidity must be controlled and not everyone pays on time. But that's life, you can't skip it. The fact that we receive proposals for workshops and training shows that people perceive us positively. We want to do well what we do in the cooperative. It is our goal to ensure that the quality of our services is at a high level. It is important for us that people say that there are not only cool and good people in "The Ark", but that the work entrusted to them will be done well."*

According to the conversation with the president, the first year was difficult for the cooperative, but it is very important not to close yourself to various possibilities because of money. You also cannot be short-sighted and you should find small loopholes that will help us when circumstances change. It's good to have a replacement. You need to look at the big picture and make a good plan: a work plan or a business plan. Then such plans translate into money, but it is so important that you can use social principles to help others. The social economy is still "fresh" in the market awareness. It takes time, probably also changes in laws, and it will slowly start to change.

Center for Social Integration in Krobia

The Center for Social Integration in Krobi at the Ecosocial Cooperative began operating on July 1, 2014. It is the first entity of this type established by a social cooperative. The mission of CIS is to rebuild and maintain the ability to independently and effectively perform social roles and move independently on the labor market.

The CIS has launched following workshops: service and gardening and cleaning, in which participants have the opportunity to gain skills and professional experience with employees of a social cooperative. Renovation and construction, as well as gardening and cleaning works are carried out in the service workshop.

There are also culinary, cultural and educational workshops in CIS. Workshop participants include: graduates of pedagogical faculties of universities who undergo professional training as educators in schools in the commune, in rural community centers and in the Communal Center for Culture and Recreation, where they acquire skills in the field of promoting the culture and tradition of Biskupizna. In 2017, another workshop was created at CIS: the tailoring and handicraft workshop "Agrafka". From 2014 to the present, 126 participants have completed apprenticeships at CIS (some of them have returned 2 or 3 times). As at 31/12/2018, 20 participants found work for longer periods, 1 participant entered retirement age.

Functioning of Occupational Therapy Workshops in Piaski

Another entity of the social economy is the Occupational Therapy Workshop in Piaski.

Workshops are intended for people with a disability certificate with a referral to classes in Occupational Therapy Workshops. Their participants are residents of the communes of Piaski, Gostyń, Pogorzela, Pępowo, Borek Wilkp. and Krobia. People from outside the village of Piaski are transported to classes by a car adapted to transport people with disabilities. Therapy for participants is conducted in five laboratories. Each of the studios improves participants in a different field. The therapy program in the studios is adapted to the psychophysical abilities of the participant. In addition to the classes provided for in individual studios, each participant can take part in physical activities in the gym and use the help of a psychologist.

The workshop building is located in the old school and is fully adapted to the needs of people with disabilities. There are people with various psycho-motor problems. There are technical, gardening, tailoring, artistic, music and computer, professional activation and household workshops, where cooking classes are conducted.

By participating in the above-mentioned works, people with disabilities learn how to cope with various life situations, perform tasks necessary in everyday life, as well as self-service. Rehabilitation classes are also held here. They are conducted by qualified teaching staff. There are also organized trips to various interesting places. Participants of the therapy have the opportunity to learn everyday activities, as well as being in each other's company, so they do not feel lonely and alienated.

The main objective of the center is the social and professional rehabilitation of the participants. In addition, the workshops are intended to increase the general fitness of participants, prepare them for life and develop their abilities and skills.

The classes are attended by 40 adults with disabilities from the vicinity of the Gostyń powiat. Physical rehabilitation is conducted for all participants. The aim of these activities is to restore or improve physical and

mental fitness. The rehabilitation program uses various forms and is adapted to the individual abilities of the participants. Exercises are conducted individually and in groups.

The workshop conducts a non-profit activity; however, it is possible to sell products, the income from which, in consultation with the participants, is intended to cover expenses related to the social integration of participants in order to stimulate activity in social rehabilitation.

Since 2012, Occupational Therapy Workshops in Piaski have been run by the Association for the Disabled "Kreatywni". The activity is financed by PFRON and the powiat self-government. In addition, the Association successfully implements projects for the integration of disabled people (including children) with the environment. The Association implements many projects thanks to which it raises funds for various types of projects. These are projects within the Act Locally program of the Polish-American Freedom Foundation, implemented in cooperation with the public administration, independently and in partnership, eg the project of the "Joy" Association, associating disabled children and their parents entitled. "Trust me, I'll trust you" or powiat boules tournaments, organized together with the "Most" Association.

The "Kreatywni" Association also won a powiat and nationwide award in the "Tell me 2012" competition for a multimedia report entitled "The Plot of Extraordinary People". As a partner in the project, together with the "Most" association, it has already implemented several county-wide initiatives and for organizations working for the disabled from the Leszno subregion. One of the last and most spectacular actions of the association was carrying out and accounting for a social action for children entitled "Renovation of the butterfly ward of the hospital in Gostyń" for which on May 27, 2014 it received the Civic Award of the President of the Republic of Poland, Bronisław Komorowski.

Summing up the activities of the Occupational Therapy Workshops in Piaski, I can say that the development of these facilities is going in the right direction. Like almost every non-governmental organization, they struggle with financial problems, however, the activities undertaken as part of the implemented projects mean that the goals and directions of these activities will be implemented in accordance with the social policy adopted by the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, setting new directions for the activities of these entities.

Professional Activity Center in Leonów

The Vocational Activity Center in Leonów began operating on December 20, 2010. It is the last facility of this type in Wielkopolska, established through the State Fund for Rehabilitation of the Disabled. ZAZ employs 35 disabled employees, 15 staff members and six trainees. In addition, the facility is implementing a project involving 16 disabled people. Nearly 80 people are involved in the development of ZAZ in Leonów, located in the commune of Borek Wielkopolski in the Gostyń powiat. The plant consists of three production departments: laundry, advertising and printing, and assembly. The aim of ZAZ is to employ people with disabilities classified as severely and moderately disabled, and by conducting professional and social rehabilitation, to prepare disabled people for an independent and independent life adequate to their psychophysical abilities.

Summary

In the Gostyński powiat, social economy entities operate at a fairly high level. All this thanks to local leaders who support social entrepreneurship initiatives. For the development of the social economy, it is necessary to act for broadly understood education, including consumer education. It depends on the choice of consumers

whether, when purchasing goods and services, they will take into account such aspects as: objectives of the company, groups of employees, corporate social responsibility.

There need for cooperation between social economy entities and entrepreneurs conducting economic activity in order to create jobs for people leaving vocational training in the CIS or wanting to "leave" from a social cooperative to the free market. Shaping the relationship between the beneficiaries of the social assistance system and the staff of social economy institutions is another challenge.

The essence of social entrepreneurship is that the current beneficiaries or participants of programs increasingly become partners, co-owners and co-managers of the activities carried out, and not only be subject to influence, which leads to addiction and inhibition of development and self-empowerment processes. In their statements, the managers emphasized the huge change in the labor market since the first social enterprises, such as CIS and Ecosocial Cooperative in Krobia, were established.

Social economy entities undertake professional activation of people who are increasingly socially withdrawn, for which they sometimes lack the skills. These changes on the labor market made it necessary to deepen the cooperation between OPS and CIS, to support each other in various additional activities and projects.

A deeper reflection on the functioning of social economy entities in the Gostyń powiat requires the mere knowledge of such social activity. It would be necessary to change the mentality of the society, as well as employees of aid institutions, to social economy entities. The use of support in many situations in the form of referral to market economy institutions would play a much greater role and many people would come out of the crisis. Financial assistance perpetuates the demanding attitude among assistance clients, so that the use of assistance is passed from generation to generation.

The essence of the social economy is to mobilize and activate people to act, and ultimately to become independent. However, for this action, appropriate instruments are needed.

In conversations with the presidents of social cooperatives, the topic of public procurement and the practice of not using the form of social clauses in tenders was often discussed, due to previous habits and lack of knowledge. Public procurement employees are afraid of the consequences of making mistakes and education is needed.

Insufficient cooperation of NGOs in the implementation of the commune's tasks and excessive competition between the leaders of the organizations were also pointed out. However, the project of establishing a Social Services Center in Krobia (from 2020) is very popular. For people who want to get involved socially, there will be an Environmental Self-Help Center and a Senior Club. In order to support actual carers, the Educational Services Center will start operating earlier.

Let us hope that in the near future the instruments of the social economy will permanently find their place in the state policy and will be treated as important entities that help people fight the problems of the world around them. It is also worth noting that the Gostyń powiat plays an important role in the creation and implementation of social projects concerning the social economy as an important element of counteracting exclusion and unemployment. Several social economy entities are already operating in the Gostyń powiat. An agreement on cooperation for the social market economy was also signed creating a support system for the local model of social economy by strengthening partnership activities.

ART ZAGRODA POLAND

Monika i Mirek Kosiccy – Social Cooperative ArtZagroda Studio from Dymaczew Stary

Repressing bad events from memory is a defense mechanism, but it gives apparent relief. In the dark corners of the subconscious, memories billow and pulse like a volcano about to erupt, Ewa Ornacka, Sentenced to Condemnation

A hole in the system

Monika and Mirek Kosiccy have been running it since 2017. The cooperative works for the adaptation of people who are socially excluded or at risk of exclusion. Monika Kosicka is a prison chaplain, so from the beginning of her social activity, helping inmates was important to her. The Cooperative's activities focus on adapting them to an active, independent life in society, including professional work. She helps in the field of legal, psychological and psychotherapeutic assistance.

- Prisoners often suffer from bipolar disorder or paranoid schizophrenia. It happens that they are not aware of their illness, they have never had access to doctors or proper education on health care. Added to this are the barriers related to maladjustment to life in society and economic exclusion, enumerates Monika Kosicka from ArtZagroda.

Systemically, there is no health support and the resulting social support, which would not be limited only to finances. There is a lack of constant medical care and access to a well-chosen series of drugs. The health care system, especially psychiatry, is underfunded - only every tenth person has access to a specialist, the National Health Fund, and the 2021 budget allocates about 3.38 percent of the budget. expenses. For comparison, the European average is 5-8 percent. . This is a double challenge for the prison and social administration areas.

- In addition, very often social workers are devoid of empathy, do not have a vocation and there is a visible lack of understanding of the mission of their own profession. This makes exclusion, especially after the sentence, happen on many levels: family, official, labor market, health, legal - enumerates Monika Kosicka.

These words are confirmed by the results of the audit carried out by the Supreme Audit Office (NIK). Professional psychological support is rare: in the years 2015-2018, only 3% of people used it in social assistance centers (OPS). former inmates (148, out of 4702). NIK also points out that people leaving prisons or detention centers receive mainly emergency financial assistance - there are no effective and long-term solutions for penitentiary social rehabilitation. One of the reasons is the lack of appropriate specialist training for employees of social welfare centers, which results in a lack of adequate knowledge. This, in turn, translates into emotional fatigue and a gradual loss of empathy.

Mirek Kosicki believes that city and commune offices, which are obliged to support former inmates, prefer to pretend that it is not their problem. Municipal social assistance centers (MOPS) also do not help in rebuilding self-esteem and agency.

- The way officials treat people after convictions is often terrible. I sometimes have the impression that people in municipal social welfare centers work there as punishment. I don't want to throw everyone in one bag, but most of the social workers I have met so far do not respect these people, do not understand the mission and vision of the institution in which they work. I don't remember the appointment. Instead of a sense of comfort, showing that someone is in a good place where they will get help, a person feels unwanted, unnecessary, as if they are a problem that needs to be eliminated as soon as possible, i.e. dismissed empty-handed. Man feels unwanted and invisible. This is unbelievable.

Over the last 20 years, over 1.5 million people have left prisons and pre-trial detention centers - an average of over 80,000. per year . Changes require public education and breaking stereotypes. Former prisoners are labeled dangerous, evil and dishonest. In other words, those who are not worth shaking hands with.

- Among other things, that's why we've always helped. We ourselves were looking for therapists, coaches, doctors, lawyers, entrepreneurs who were ready to employ people after convictions. We were and still are motivated and determined to help socially excluded people, because there are very few organizations that can support them - adds Mirek.

An invisible punishment

The numbers are impressive: only 15.3 percent. of former inmates positively assess the usefulness of prison social rehabilitation programs for life at large, while OPS show no interest in these programs .

Another problem that Monika Kosicka points out is maladjustment to life in society. He calls them the helplessness of life. This one connects directly with exclusion that affects all social groups. It may concern former prisoners, but also women, who often, despite their education (e.g. language, trade) for years dealt with raising children, which makes it difficult for them return to the labor market after, for example, a 20-year break. Exclusion is a broad concept, it can happen to each of us.

Clumsiness is often associated with the aforementioned life wound, which affects people at every stage of life and concerns the deficit of social competences (including empathy). Studies on social competence clearly indicate that apart from personality traits and the influence of the environment in which we grow up, it is important whether we are accepted or rejected by society and institutions in the case of long-term life problems¹.

¹C. Junge, P.M. Valkenburg, M. Deković, S. Branje, *The building blocks of social competence: Contributions of the Consortium of Individual Development*, "Developmental Cognitive Neuroscience" 2020, Vol. 45, 100861, s. 1–2.

If someone who is excluded wants to get back on his feet and gets a job thanks to our Cooperative (on a contract of employment or mandate), he usually receives benefits immediately. Why? Because according to official tables, he earns too much. For example, child care allowance, social allowance for housing, subsidies to bills are automatically collected. I would like to point out that the salaries we are talking about are not high: without allowances and without support, it is impossible to live on them at a normal level. What should I do to earn my wages and keep my benefits? People are employed for the national minimum wage, the so-called garbage cans, no health insurance, no pension security. Thanks to this, however, you will not lose benefits and allowances, which allows you to survive somehow. So the questions arise: How to resocialize people in this context? How to unlearn scheming, teach resourcefulness and being honest? – wonders Mirek Kosicki.

According to the Supreme Audit Office in its analysis of the life of former prisoners, returning to crime is most often the result of problems with finding a job, poor housing and material conditions, and socially excluding ostracism.

Satisfying basic needs, time for regeneration and pleasure for this social group are very difficult to achieve. ArtZagroda's social activities also focus on making people, often for the first time in their lives, feel loved, appreciated, taken care of and noticed.

- They need this humanly, this reaching out to them. For example: one of the former inmates drove a car after alcohol and rammed it into vegetation on the property of a local councillor. It turned into a big scandal. Our ward was terrified of what had happened to the point that she began to hide. Someone even advised her that the only way out was to flee abroad... When I found out about all this, I met her and calmly explained that there were other solutions, that it would be a pity if six years of her hard work to come back to society, in such a stupid way to miss and deepen the existing problem. We went to the police station to ask her to voluntarily submit to punishment, which always opens the door to talks and negotiations, says Monika Kosicka.

The probation officer agreed that she could legally go abroad to work and earn money for the designated fine. In Poland it would be very difficult. Why? In our country, the conviction is erased after 10 years, and employment with such papers often borders on a miracle .

Monika Kosicka explains that people are in fact constantly punished for having committed a crime before. In one of the newspapers we could read about the controversy related to the employment of bodyguards for people after serving final sentences for intentional crimes. Even the Minister of the Interior and Administration spoke out, clearly pointing out the potential danger to citizens. The company employing the former

The company employing former inmates had its license revoked in court. Theoretically, after five years, you can apply to the court for extraordinary obliteration, but this practically does not happen - you need a lot of certificates.

- We take on a large part of the curatorial work, especially the related one with formalities. Former inmates have seven days from leaving prison to provide their address, 14 days to report to the probation officer, and 30 days to indicate their place of work. If someone has a suspended sentence and they can't get everything done,

it is the probation officer who has grounds to apply for a sentence, and such a person will return to prison. Pathology – says Monika.

OPS practically do not cooperate with probation officers, penitentiary centers or prisons. Therefore, it is difficult to talk about any long-term and effective help. Moreover, as indicated by the Supreme Audit Office, “apart from community interviews, OPS do not analyze the effectiveness of the assistance provided, and employees do not know the current situation of their charges. Some of the former inmates take up permanent or occasional work (approx. 38.7%), some return to criminality” . Hence the necessity of post-penitentiary assistance and the need to tighten cooperation between social welfare centers and other institutions operating in this field.

Empathy and responsibility

Monika and Mirek Kosicki believe that a significant lever for change would be if people working in support centers treated their work seriously, understood what social rehabilitation is, and were aware of the importance of adopting a responsible attitude.

- If the head of the Municipal Guard has a person directed to him who has, under the so-called. hours to do 30 hours of work, then there can be no situation in which after a few hours you count work only to get rid of this person and tick off the task.

Such an attitude of a person in uniform, performing public utility functions, gives tacit permission not to feel obliged to act honestly. It only shows that the system can be deceived and you can not care what the judge imposed. In this way, the sense and legitimacy of social rehabilitation is undermined, because what is known to these people is strengthened, which is why they often ended up in prison. It also spoils the work and wastes all the effort we put into teaching people how to function normally in society, sums up Monika Kosicka.

Company description

The ArtZagroda Social Cooperative was founded in 2017 in Dymaczewo Stary. The main goal of its activity is the adaptation of people who are socially excluded or at risk of exclusion. It conducts activities consisting in re-adaptation assistance for the re-adaptation of a sick person, people temporarily isolated from natural social life or people with disabilities to an active, independent life in the society and to work. She supports legal, psychological and psychotherapeutic assistance.

Website: <https://artzagroda.pl/>

DIAKONINA & ERGON CZECH REPUBLIC

Cooperation for social change in the Moravian -Silesian Region (CZ)

It was 2001 when Slezská diakonie, the NGO providing social services for people with disabilities, elderly people, homeless people and families in the Moravian-Silesian Region of the Czech Republic, decided to start its first sheltered working places for 5 people with disabilities. It started to run the small „business“ for crushing pet bottles and for assembly work. The pet bottles crushing had to stop due to economic reasons two years ago, but the assembly work started to be bigger thanks to an emerging collaboration between Slezská diakonie and local industrial company called STEELTEC CZ.

The STEELTEC CZ was developing a business with international company GARDENA which produces small garden tools. And it was a great opportunity for collaboration between the sheltered workshop and the „big business“.

Slezská diakonie decided in 2004 to make the sheltered workshop an independent social enterprise because of the legislative conditions for subsidies for the sheltered working places. And ERGON-social enterprise was established as an NGO with a goal to provide working places for people with disabilities – both physical and mental health or intellectual issues.

With an increasing cooperation with STEELTEC CZ the social enterprise could develop another 5 working places, but there was an issue of spaces and logistics to be able to meet the needs of the business environment.

That is why the director of both companies decided to enlarge the cooperation and ERGON applied for European Structural Funds to be able to build an assembly hall in the industrial zone in a town of Třinec. Based on negotiation and partnership with a town of Třinec, it was possible to buy a rather big piece of land in the new industrial zone nearby the town. The town of Třinec provided a very good conditions for ERGON to be able to buy the land as an NGO for a better price.

The project application for a new assembly hall was approved – WONDERFULL, the adventure of social entrepreneurship could start in its full volume.

The new assembly hall was built in 2006 with an investment of 1,4 mil. Euro and with a capacity of 50 working places for people with disabilities. The investment was covered by 90% from the European funds. The partnership between the ERGON and STEELTEC CZ was developed on a very professional way with the aim that industrial business provides work and social business provides working places for people with disabilities. Since that the partnership has been flourishing and during another 8 years the complex of assembly halls was enlarged to 4 halls. The assembly halls provide space for more than 200 working places for people with disabilities and ERGON cooperates mainly with STEELTEC CZ, but also with another companies like WALMARK. For WALMARK it provides packaging work of vitamins and food supplements.

The social entrepreneurship is a great partner for industrial business as it is able to do the simpler assembly work. On the other hand the new assembly halls have enabled to enlarge the business and make it in a very professional way with an aim to cover all production and logistic processes. The products are painted in an own painting line, completed, packed, stored in a stock and then distributed according to the needs of customers. ERGON is more focused in organising people's work, STEELTEC CZ is more focused on production and business processes. The cooperation of the partners is very effective and sometimes not easy, but it works and it provides working possibilities for more than 200 people with disabilities. For those people it might be difficult to find the job on the open labour market, so the support of ERGON is very important.

But ERGON has not stayed still. It has also developed another working programmes for another people with disabilities with a focus to respond to their needs. It runs a laundry service and cleaning service as well.

The social scope of the business is also reinforced by another social activities. ERGON provides social counselling service for indebtedness which is opened not only for employees, but also for general public in the town of Třinec and surrounding. ERGON is still in a nice cooperation with Slezská diakonie and provides training places for people with mental health issues and people with intellectual disabilities who are clients of social services of Slezská diakonie. This cooperation enables to people with serious health issues to be involved in working activities through work rehabilitation.

ERGON has gone through more than 20 years of social entrepreneurship road and created a partnership between the industrial business and social business that has brought a real changes in lives of hundreds of people with disabilities. It also created a communication and partnership with several stakeholders both from commercial sector, NGO sector and local municipalities and that always brings social change.

ERGON-social enterprise is and NGO established in 2004 providing working places for around 250 people with disabilities in the Moravian-Silesian region of the Czech republic. It runs social business in assembly work, laundry services and cleaning services.

You can find more (in Czech) at: www.ergonsp.cz

*STEELTEC CZ is an industrial company, the main activity of the company STEELTEC CZ is **large series engineering metal** production followed by a further treatment in the process of engineering production – **welding, grinding, powder coating**. Companies own **tool shop** and **provides** the customer complete service associated with the product development including the preparation and course of series production, assembly and subsequent delivery of packed product and required plastic subdeliveries to its destination according to customer requirements.*

More about: www.steeltec.cz

Town of Třinec is a local municipality near the borders with Poland and Slovakia with around 25 000 inhabitants. It is involved in a support of social entrepreneurship activities and support of people with disabilities within its network of social services and social businesses. In Třinec there is a local group of companies/organizations active in a regional development.

More about the town: www.trinecko.cz

Slezská diakonie is an NGO providing 112 various social services in the Moravian-Silesian Region for various groups of people in need- people with disabilities, families and children, elderly people, homeless people. The services are provided by 1200 staff members who are supporting more than 8500 clients. Slezská diakonie is actively involved in a cooperation for development of social entrepreneurship and working possibilities for people with disabilities. It runs its own social enterprise for production of decorative items called CHRPA – social firm of Slezská diakonie (www.chrpakrnov.cz)

More about Slezská diakonie at: www.slezskadiakonie.cz

LJUBEZNOST MACEDONIA

From "phantoms" to students

In the summer period, G.L., mother of three minors, applied for humanitarian aid children, who was currently pregnant with her fourth child. Although the mother addressed specifically for humanitarian aid, after the conversation with her and the analysis done, we determined that that family was facing significant problems.

Actual condition

Namely, all three children were "phantoms", i.e. persons who do not exist in the legal sense system, i.e. they don't even have a social security number. Because of that, the children did not even have health insurance insurance, which prevented regular health examinations and vaccinations the same ones. They could not even attend classes, although the older children are aged 7 and 8 years. In short, they were prevented from living like their peers, who every day they went to and from school, while they spent their days in the small park in near the elementary school, living in the hope that one day they will enter the the school as students.

Which was undertaken by us

Living poor is a problem in itself, and living without a social security number, that it means that you are not formally living. Unfortunately, such cases are not rare, but very frequent we face in everyday life. And the struggle to introduce a "phantom" into the system is long, laborious and exhausting. In such intertwined cases, he himself is difficult beginning, because you don't know where to start. So we started by providing the cards for newborn children, through which it is proved that that person (in the case the mother), on such and such a date, gave birth to a male or female child. Then the children had to be examined by a doctor, who gave a certificate of their age.

Although all this sounds simple, yet very complicated for a family facing financial problems, and at the same time ignorance, because each of these certificates costs money, which most of the time socially disadvantaged people are not able to pay them. So we how association, we covered these costs, providing the documentation for pre-the procedure for obtaining an identity number, which is of essential importance.

While waiting ID number, the school year started and the days passed quickly, and the children could not to attend classes because their case of obtaining a personal identification number, stuck in the "cobwebs" of institutions. We had no other way but to talk to the director and the school psychologist to accept the children in the educational process, while guaranteeing them that the procedure for obtaining a personal identification number has been started.

Due to the complexity of the case, the school hesitated whether to accept children teachings that actually do not exist in the legal system. However, after long talks and assurances from our side that the children will still receive an identity number soon, we encountered of understanding from the school management and the children have already started classes. One part of the story was successfully completed, the children are already students, who are joyful and eager to knowledge every day they started attending classes. Now, it remains to get the registration numbers. The inability of the institutions to deal with this problem Institutions very often further complicate the work, because the ineffective and inefficient system and the use of outdated methods in the work. Cases become especially complicated with this category of people (social endangered and homeless), because by their very birth they are intertwined in the system labyrinths, which do not allow them to float to the surface.

Namely, for these fellow citizens, it is a challenge in itself to secure their personal documents identification, health insurance or securing some of the rights which are offered by the Law on Social Protection. At the moment those people meet any what a bureaucratic obstacle, they immediately give up on further struggle with the institutions, which for them resembles a fight with windmills, and the institutions themselves they have no mechanisms to help the socially disadvantaged and ignorant parties. Like that, this category of people is left at the mercy and disfavor of society and the system, and they see the only hope in civil associations that help them in mediocrity for acquiring personal documentation. However, the following questions remain unanswered: What is the capacity of civil associations and how many people can they serve? What about people who can't do they even reach the associations?

HOTEL DALJAN, OHRID, MACEDONIA

Website/FB:

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Hotel-Daljan/522557911263880/>

Introduction

Hotel Daljan is a modern resort on the shore of Lake Ohrid, beachfront, with horticulturally landscaped entrance and terrace. Built in the last century, in recent years it has been refurbished and modernized, and certainly bears witness of extraordinary human stories, from well-organized vacations to thematic events for people with disabilities. All this implemented by an amazing team of employees, 50% of whom are disabled. The recipe for success is the professional training provided to the entire team and the inclusive work technology (own solution created based on years experience of communication problems, untimely delivery of orders) - signal communication, as well as protocols for reception, serving and communication of persons with disabilities. Hotel Daljan is located on the shore of Lake Ohrid, 2 kilometers from the center of the City of Ohrid, with capacity of 26 rooms, each equipped with own balcony and bathroom, with possibility to be adapted to the needs of the guests.

Hotel Daljan is a place where sign language is official communication, where all the employees are one big family and they transmit that energy to the visitors of the hotel. The stay itself provides added value, the visitor is intrigued by the light signaling in the restaurant and rooms, through which the order is sent and delivered, the staff is announced and the team members are always willing to share information, motivate, and help learn interesting words of sign language.

The work of development and support of people with disabilities is part of the life story of the Manager Slavica Stefanoska, who has dedicated herself to supporting deaf family members. She constantly helped them in the Association, and when she started her tourism studies in Ohrid, she focused on inclusive tourism. It was from that student dream that Hotel Daljan came to reality. Multi-year management of the entire renovation process, up to the establishment of an excellent team that provides a set of hotel services for relaxation to persons with disabilities and other guests, and on the top of it, employment of persons with disabilities.

The human stories are impressive, the assistant cook with primary education had no previous experience in food preparation in a catering facility, she was reskilled through training and practical work. This middle-aged woman, in conditions of economic instability, loses her job as a seamstress and, with the support of the hotel team, starts a new profession. Complete retraining was achieved with the huge support of the hotel management and fellow employees. Great patience and dedication of the head of the kitchen, Jovan Stefanoski, who works exclusively with deaf assistants and the situation itself motivates him to learn sign language. The master cookbook concludes by highlighting the ability of the deaf to cook extraordinary recipes from traditional foods to contemporary desserts. The entire maintenance of the hotel is left to the hardworking hands of deaf people - the maids and the janitor. Inclusive technology is also installed in the rooms, thus facilitating the communication of deaf guests with maids who are also disabled. Light signaling is such a simple, but super effective communication system. The whole learning process has many challenges, especially during high season when there are many guests in the hotel, nevertheless the results are excellent. Although they work as major background actors in the hotel's infrastructure, the whole team functions perfectly - like clockwork that delivers what is expected in a timely manner.

About us

Hotel Daljan is a story that promotes - Tourism for all

Equality, fairness, respect for people's dignity, non-discrimination - equal opportunities for all are implemented through tourism.

With constant upgrading, the choice of occupations that deaf people can work in, professions in which they can find livelihood but also satisfaction, self-confidence through which they can show their creativity, innovation and socialization, increases.

Communication and hospitality is of vital importance and it is particularly important for frontline employees, customer facing staff, who must be able to communicate effectively with guests to meet their needs and provide adequate services. In order to understand the challenges faced by people with disabilities, Hotel Daljan provides training to the staff to raise awareness about disabilities. The implementation of on-the-job training is in a sign or hybrid way, through experiential and practical work, as deaf people come without any previous experience.

An accessible hotel with well-trained staff makes guests with disabilities feel equal.

Vision – We create a world that ensures equality and sustainability

Mission - Leader in inclusive tourism and inclusive work environment

Scope and impact:

Promoting inclusive practices for guests and employment for persons with disabilities

Building brand recognized for inclusiveness and sustainability

Strengthening the organization in all areas to achieve the mission

Impact

A focus on equality and achieving visible results that make a positive difference for all guests and provide an environment for employment of people with disabilities in the long term.

Values

EQUALITY - Everyone deserves to do what they want and what makes them happy

EVERY PROFESSION ACCESSIBLE TO EVERYONE - We enabled the inclusion of the deaf in the tourism profession

THE WAY OF PERCEIVING THE WORLD OF SILENCE – Guide in the directions of training for tourism professions

SIGN LANGUAGE communication among all

ADAPTABILITY - Working conditions compatible with employees' disabilities

ROADMAP FOR THE REST OF THE COMMUNITY – Inclusive tourism that provides accessible jobs for people with disabilities

RESPECTING PEOPLE'S DIFFERENCES – Every guest is welcome

Policy

We listen, we care and we act. The policy is aimed at ensuring professional results during all activities to meet all defined requirements, including clients, partners and donors, as well as statutory and legal requirements.

Hotel Daljan is committed to continuous improvement of the quality management system in order to meet the needs and expectations of our customers, employees and partners.

Continuous improvement of the effectiveness of the quality management system, thereby increasing the value of the delivered services.

It ensures a high standard of competence, professionalism and credibility of the staff.

Continuous increase in the number of satisfied customers.

Operating in accordance with relevant legal requirements.

Increasing the qualification of the staff.

Providing staff with a satisfactory working environment, which provides opportunities for development.

Encouraging teamwork and personal engagement by supporting and rewarding people's achievements and good performance.

Working in a clear, fair and transparent manner.

History

Hotel Daljan is a shelter society for the work of disabled people and has existed in this organizational form since 2008. It dates back to 1975 as a resort for the hearing impaired built by the Union of the Hearing Impaired as part of a network of resorts for the hearing impaired in the former Yugoslav republics. In 1998, it was registered as an independent commercial entity owned by the Association of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing of Macedonia.

Slavica Stefanoska - Manager of Hotel Daljan has been in a management position since 2008, as a result of many years of active work in the Union, since 1998 and as a member of the Management Board. In 2005, she also worked in the Association of the Deaf in Ohrid.

Hotel Daljan is going through a transformation process, renovation and registration as a shelter company. Team building means complete training at all levels.

Organizational structure

Currently, ZD Hotel Daljan has a total of 10 full-time employees.

Activities

Daljan has developed a range of activities for guests with disabilities and various events adapted to tourists with disabilities:

- 1.Competition for the best chef, an event with a tradition longer than 20 years, which consists of practical training on how to cook, how to decorate food and the table, how to serve
- 2.Organized tours with translators to the cultural and historical sights in Ohrid, with specific customized programs
- 3.National sports fishing competition for the deaf over a period of three days with provided logistics of attractive fishing locations, professional judges and a closing ceremony with the announcement of the winners
- 4.Organized visits of students from special schools

Cooperation

Daljan cooperates with various companies, municipalities and NGOs and we are open to new local and international partnerships.

ASSOCIATION MISLA, MACEDONIA

MENTAL HEALTH CARE SELF-EMPOWERMENT

The mental health Association Misla from Skopje is a civic organization that is founded and managed by users working for the protection and support of people with mental disorders and the protection of mental health in general among the entire population.

Our organization was founded in 2016, first as an informal group of three friends from their student days and afterward, it was registered as an association of citizens in February 2017. The need for its establishment arose from the personal challenges, and challenges of the families and friends of the founders for support of this vulnerable category of citizens, as well as from the lack of an association of this type – even today, we are the only civic organization which is dedicated to and focused on support of the patients of psychiatric hospitals in North Macedonia.

In our work, we have had a set of various activities for different kinds of social and healthcare support for members and users of our organization, dozens of citizens of different ages have formally or informally passed through Association Misla, some stayed, others left, but they all had something to receive from our organization, and often to give something in return, because we are a grassroots organization that originates from the community, with almost no outside support, neither from the state, nor from the private sector, and we rely on self-help groups and mutual support, volunteer engagement of members and peer service from the users themselves.

However, this is not the topic of this story. As an inspirational story, we will tell you the brief stories of the three founders of Association Misla who faced various issues in their lives, similar to the problems of our current end-users. Nevertheless, on their own and with the help of our association they managed to overcome their challenges and develop as individuals and as professionals, thus marking out their life paths in the right directions.

The first of the founders with the initials K.S., after the initial period of enthusiasm with the founding and with the work of Misla, after a year or two he gradually reoriented himself to another activity, which is show business. So far, he has made dozens of successful performances attended by thousands of spectators. Although he left our organization, he continued to advocate for our mission and values, and in 2022 he founded a new civic organization called Happiness Makers with which he tries to connect the show business with informing the public about the issues of mental health and mental disorders. We are still communicating with K.S. about some of our activities and users and we support him in his new work engagements. He is full of ideas and still wants to help us in our work and to help our new end-users that Association Misla has acquired during the years of its existence.

The second founder D.P. was facing more serious challenges and was in constant and urgent need of psychotherapy and other types of support from our association. But despite that, he contributed to the administrative and programmatic activities we worked on and thus made a great contribution to the organizational setup and to laying the foundations for the long-term operations of Association Misla. With our support, and with the support of our partners and collaborators – psychiatrists and psychotherapists, but also with the dedicated effort of D.P. himself, over the years he made great progress in improving his psychophysical

condition, in his personal growth and development and has largely overcome the problems and challenges he faced. Three years ago he decided to continue his education and qualify as an IT specialist. Later he managed to get a job in a renowned software company where he works as a coder at present. Recently D.P. decided to move on and left the Association Mislá, considering that he is no longer in need of our services and that he wants to pursue other interests in his life. We are happy with his past contribution and respect his decision, although we all miss his energy and his contribution.

The last of the founders is D.I. and he is still in Association Mislá. All these years, he has been working on developing our organization and within it, on creating a program of activities as a system that will help our users. By means of communicating and informing the public, professionals and state institutions, D.I. constantly advocates for the protection of the rights of patients in psychiatric hospitals and patients of psychiatric specialists. After the two other founders left our association, he took the lead of the organization and is trying to lift up some of the new members and end-users to help him manage it in the future.

Although at the beginning he did not have any knowledge of the work of civil society organizations, especially not of organizations of the type of Association Mislá, he has been gradually improving his work, his knowledge and the network of contacts necessary for successful support of our end users. Today D.I. can not only be identified as a successful leader of a non-governmental organization but in addition to Association Mislá, he is engaged in several other related organizations that help vulnerable categories of citizens and thus contribute to social integration and a better society for all. In that direction, D.I. has in the meantime enrolled in postgraduate policy studies to learn how to better represent our users and advocate for their rights before state institutions and other stakeholders.

All three of the founders of Association Mislá, while trying to develop our organization and to help others who were more vulnerable than them, also helped themselves, overcame the problems they were facing, contributed to their own growth and development as individuals, became productive members of our society, and each in his way, they traced their life paths as professionals in a relevant sector and organization.

SOCIAL INTEGRATION & EMPOWERMENT CENTRE - SIEC MACEDONIA

Going down the road of social entrepreneurship....

We first met seven years ago. The meeting was held in Suto Orizari, Macedonia, which has Europe's largest Roma community and is plagued by poverty, social exclusion, and prejudices. That meeting changed, inspired, motivated, and confirmed that we were on the right track.

Attempting to empower socially excluded citizens is like navigating the maze of society, leaving no room for immediate long-term solutions. Over time, social entrepreneurship has proven to be a genuine path toward human dignity and respect for people.

Marginalized communities, such as Roma, women, youth, people with disabilities, and others, are unfortunately frequently left feeling inferior, demotivated, hopeless, and despairing. Sometimes, the only glimmer of hope they find is in the activities or projects of non-profit organizations, which also struggle to get their projects approved by donor organizations, which do not always provide an optimal match in funding the actual needs of the local communities and focus more on awareness-raising rather than on the economic empowerment.

Nonetheless, implementing projects can provide a sense of relief when you manage to include children in kindergarten, provide books and learning material, and gather parents and children for creative workshops or awareness-raising activities on the importance of education, healthcare, and other social issues. However, when a project comes to an end, children and parents simply need to continue their daily struggles with the prior social integration efforts and positive impact interrupted. In this process, both communities and non-governmental organizations are left wondering about the missing links, as well as the lack of continuity and empowerment of people on a deeper level.

With over 20 years of community empowerment work, we have learned by practical experience that running awareness-raising projects is not always sufficient when it comes to social inclusion efforts for children, women, Roma, and other marginalized groups. We recognized this more than 10 years ago and informed donors about the need for economic empowerment of poor families, but we received no recognition for such proposals.

At the time, we wanted to develop social entrepreneurship initiatives by involving Roma women in economic activities such as catering, cleaning services, and elderly care while we were running projects that could provide at least some basic social inclusion into education and healthcare. However, the element of economic empowerment was still missing.

Then, one day, an inspiring meeting took place on the premises of the NGO Ambrela which supports Roma integration - Ms. Barbara Sadowska was introduced to us as an international expert in social entrepreneurship. We realized that she was a person with a warm heart who truly believes in the mission and vision of human support and solidarity once she began sharing her beliefs about how social entrepreneurship can change people's daily lives and empower them.

After the official part of the meeting, tears of joy flowed down my cheeks as I realized there are people who truly believe in supporting local communities not only based on projects but on the long-term vision of self-empowerment through economic empowerment and by giving respect, dignity, and self-confidence to people, making them believe that they can change their situation.

The story of the Barka Foundation working with marginalized groups that Barbara shared during that meeting changed our paths. As I reflected on my work with Ambrela, accomplishments, and setbacks, one year passed. Ideas were being born, out of which the idea of starting a fresh, new organization SIEC arose.

SIEC was envisaged as a center that would return dignity and empowerment to the region of South Eastern

Europe. In the transition of the 90s period, we lost the feeling of mutual self-respect that we once knew and cherished.

Despite many years of prior professional NGO experience, of its individual members, SIEC had to start as a brand new organization, practically from scratch. We had to find our place, reposition ourselves in the NGO world and explore social entrepreneurship as an empowerment tool for communities, as envisaged in the past. This was a natural flow and development coming from years-long experiences of community empowerment where often the results accomplished were short-term. With time, we wanted to find ways for even more concrete support for the local communities.

The initial steps of developing the organization were filled with small fears, doubts, and efforts to become visible and find a way toward community empowerment. With our gradual growth steps, we always kept in touch with Ms. Barbara, even after completing her mission in Macedonia and her return to Poland. Our regular contact resulted in building one of our most important projects, the 1st Visegrad Fund-supported project, Social ***Economy without Borders***.

This international project enabled all of the partner participants from Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Macedonia to learn from each other about good practices, and laws, starting social enterprises, and including marginalized groups. Every new study visit was an inspiration and motivation to grow and to continue connecting with professionals from municipalities, social enterprises, and non-governmental organizations who work with dedication, and devotion, and who are above all, warm, and kind individuals who understand what it means to build societies based on solidarity and the true meaning of empowerment for individuals and communities.

And several years down the line, while implementing the 2nd follow-up Visegrad project called ***Building International Bridges – Social Entrepreneurship as a Tool for Local Economic Empowerment***, that has brought together 5 partner countries, namely, Poland, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Hungary, and Macedonia in common efforts to continue spreading the word of social entrepreneurship, SIEC has become so inspired by the whole process of mutual learning that we have not only implemented several projects with marginalized groups, **but we have started our social entrepreneurship initiative of sustainable fashion and clothes upcycling.**

Nowadays, SIEC has its start-up product line of T-shirts, bags, rucksacks, and aprons available for the wider public, while in the future, we want to explore the possibility of producing linen, tablecloths, etc. for the needs of hotels, hospitals, etc. Most importantly, we would like to stress that the Visegrad project has not only achieved the establishment of partnerships at the Macedonian level between 6 NGOs ARNO, MISLA, SIEC, SOLEM, AHP PRILEP, and Ljubeznost, but that our partner Ljubeznost will start their social entrepreneurship activities that will enable collaboration based on the production of organic products, for which SIEC will supply packaging.

In retrospect, one seemingly simple meeting can truly change our lives. Meeting Barbara changed ours. She brought together people from Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Macedonia who also believe that social entrepreneurship is the key to social integration. Ant the next in line to join us is Serbia.

As an international Visegrad Funs group, we have decided to carry this bright torch of friendship, solidarity, and support and join forces with Serbian partners for the coming Visegrad follow-up project, with the continued building of bridges between EU and SEE countries and spreading the word of inspiration and motivation for new municipalities, NGOs, social enterprises who want to join us on our path of collaboration and simple, down-to-earth human empowerment.

For more information about SIEC (Social Integration & Empowerment Centre) and our work/products, please visit our website www.siec.mk, and FB page SIEC Macedonia.

If you are interested in the work of our Macedonian partners, please visit their pages:

NGO ARNO, North Macedonia - stands for Social Innovation since 2013. Its first project "Coolinari" got recognized as a Social Entrepreneurship Initiative (sales of cooking classes and profit re-investment for young chefs' job integration). ARNO is further acknowledged as a national resource for awareness and inspiration in the field of Green Entrepreneurship (organizer of 6 editions of the Green Ideas Competition). In 2017, ARNO visited Barka together with representatives of 20 other organizations, including but not limited to ministries and job centers. ARNO believes in future-oriented leadership and collaborative relationships. (<https://www.arno.org.mk/>)

NGO Social Integration & Empowerment Centre – SIEC, North Macedonia – contributes to returning dignity and self-respect to the people of the South-Eastern Europe region. SIEC has more than 20 years of accumulated expertise and experience related to projects in the Balkans and Western/Northern Europe in a wide range of areas, including community development, gender equity, Romani integration, immigrant and refugee rights, anti-discrimination, legal assistance, human rights, education, healthcare, and employment. Inspired by the Barka model, SIEC has long-term plans of developing social entrepreneurship initiatives with other relevant stakeholders (www.siec.mk),

NGO Misla, North Macedonia – is concerned with the issues of mental health of the Macedonian citizens and works on awareness-raising for social integration of the citizens who face mental illnesses and who often get stigmatized and socially excluded. NGO Misla aims at developing future projects of social entrepreneurship that will ensure the social inclusion of all marginalized citizens. (<https://www.facebook.com/asocijacijamisla/posts/3448948911790162/>)

NGO Ljubeznost, North Macedonia – offers assistance to homeless citizens and socially marginalized families and individuals. Their vision is to create a support center for deprived citizens and to design projects for their future empowerment. (<https://www.ljubeznost.mk>)

Citizen Association SOLEM, North Macedonia – supports adults with intellectual disabilities in developing skills with which they will be able to contribute to society. SOLEM's vision is for persons with intellectual disabilities to exercise their human rights and freedoms and to be completely included in society as equal, responsible, and capable citizens of North Macedonia. Association SOLEM fulfills its goals through the development of Self-advocacy and Self-determination skills and running a social business [handicrafts4u](http://handicrafts4u.org.mk) (<https://www.solem.org.mk/>)

NGO AHP Prilep, North Macedonia - Humanitarian Organization "Aid for Handicapped and the Poor" stands for equal opportunities for all, advanced level of education, strengthened social well-being of marginalized and vulnerable groups, and improved multi-ethnic understanding in society. The organization is active in several sectors of activity: education, social inclusion, and social entrepreneurship. The main focus of NGO AHP-Prilep is the recycling of wood and plastic waste and the production of new products with added value. The profit is reinvested in NGO and AHP.

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• Visegrad Fund



**Building International Bridges – Social Entrepreneurship
as a Tool for Local Economic Empowerment**

Project ID # 22130175

The project is co-financed by the Governments of Czechia, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia through Visegrad Grants from International Visegrad Fund. The mission of the fund is to advance ideas for sustainable regional cooperation in Central Europe