



FemNet — resource centre for women - with the aim to strengthen women's position in society, in labour market and in entrepreneurship.
www.femnet.se

A journey about social entrepreneurship – for international exchange and networking

● The project idea

- An international meeting place for women about gender equality, sustainability, empowerment and social inclusion
- Highlight good examples and role models of the work of social enterprises that are working with recycling, textile and handicraft
- The meeting place will contribute to exchange of experience, development of new ideas, establish contacts and build a network for the participants from all countries

Ergani Center in Thessaloniki, Greece





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Women create their own jobs in Greece

The Mobile Unit in northwestern Greece was a success. It made it possible to reach women in the countryside who were not able to travel and offer them training, counselling and support to start small businesses. The Mobile Unit also helped to develop existing businesses and cooperatives.

"We travelled from village to village and met many female leaders and organizations", says Popi Sourmaidou from Ergani Center, a veteran in the struggle for women's possibilities to create their own jobs where employment is no option.

"Due to lack of funding we had to close the Mobile Unit but we plan to apply for new funding next year."

In the Greek countryside the unemployment rate among women is high even when it doesn't show in official statistics. Many women work in family business but don't get normal revenues and hence no or very low pension. Regular jobs are rare.



Popi Sourmaido is a veteran in the struggle for women's possibilities to create their own jobs.

● Ergani Center

- Ergani Center is a center for the support of employment and entrepreneurship of women and was established in 1991. Ergani Center is a non Governmental, non profit making organisation and supports women, young people and people facing social exclusion on employment and entrepreneurship issues.
- Ergani's headquarters is in Thessaloniki (Central Macedonia) and has a branch in Kozani (Western Macedonia). The staff is scientists/experts and provides information, flexible training and counseling services.
<https://www.ergani.gr/en>

Rented car filled with experts

The Mobile Unit consisted of a rented car filled with experts, a laptop and a possibility to connect to the internet. Before it started touring, the ground work was done through a number of round table meetings in the whole area.

"We knew the women leaders and had the necessary connections. Media published a lot about our plans, both in newspapers, local TV and radio. The meetings were organized in two ways. Either we asked the women leaders to arrange a meeting for those who were interested. Or women asked us to come and help to start a business or cooperative. Usually we could use premises owned by the municipality for free. We helped with training, how to fill in forms correctly, how to find money or facilities."

At the time of the Mobile Unit project it was possible to get funding for small projects. As Popi Sourmaidou remembers it was between 5000 and 8000 euro, important as a contribution to the startup costs. It was also possible to get help with 50-60 per cent of the costs to finance a bigger investment. Like equipment for a bakery or sewing machines.

Pie festival to promote the cooperatives

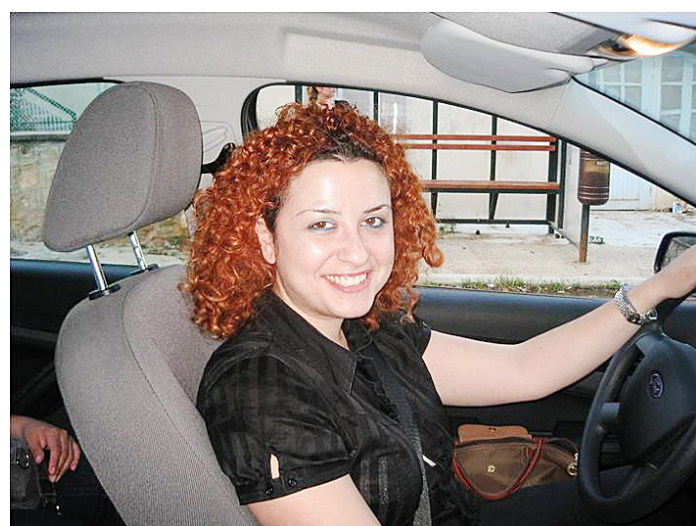
Baking, cooking, producing pasta or jam and doing handicraft. Many of the projects have a stereotypical gender profile. Popi Sourmaidou explains why.

"This was something the women knew how to do. And the results were amazing. Greek pies are one example. Those are not sweet but a meal. The filling is often cheese and vegetables but can also be cabbage and meat. The cooperatives normally had 5-8 members and were able to use empty municipal premises provided to them for free."

Ergani Center helped to organize a pie festival to promote the cooperatives. Popular journalists made the presentations, a restaurant (owned by a woman entrepreneur beneficiary to Ergani Center during previous years) offered premises. Well known chefs and people from the food industry made up the jury. Nine cooperatives participated, three of them won prizes.

Many of the cooperatives still exist. Some are closed, not because they were not successful but because the founders have become pensioners and no younger women want to take over.

Ergani Center is one of the oldest organizations in Greece for promoting women's entrepreneurship. Now Ergani Center works together with two other organizations, Women in Network Greece and the Social Cooperative Earth Spiral.



The Mobile Unit, a rented car filled with experts, was a success.



Several cooperatives were successful turning baking into a serious business.

- Ergani's support of women cooperatives
 - Working with the teams of women
 - Team building activities
 - Improving cooperation capacity
 - Developing communication skills
 - Developing entrepreneurial skills
 - Networking activities
 - Training
 - Study visits
 - Exhibitions and/or promoting activities

Local development in rural areas

The next project in the Greek region Macedonia is about local development in rural areas.

"We plan to organize empowerment workshops for women and provide counselling in order to start small businesses based on the local dynamic. It will be a cooperative activity. The idea is to emerge a collective work with the local cooperative in order to attract more women and to lower the expenses."

"We will use the premises of existing cooperatives for the workshops and don't have to pay any rent. And we don't need external experts since we ourselves have different scientific backgrounds. Therefore, the cost of starting and running a project like this will be much lower. The plan is to start as soon as the pandemic is over and the meetings can be in the real and not in the virtual reality."

100 women who want to start business

"We hope we can start with small groups in September 2021. Next year we plan to reach 100 women who want to start something new, a business or an association. Plus, support 50 existing businesses, cooperatives or organizations."

What is the most important part of this project? Popi Sourmaidou does not hesitate:

"Empowerment! That is so, so important! Then it is networking and finding new connections. What we do will be based on the future hopes of the women. We will have future workshops to improve the ideas. This is a method to for planning and forming a vision of the future. Workshops help define aims and identify problems. We also want to improve some



Empowerment, networking and finding new contacts is important.

co-designing activities, aimed to plan the development of an area where we include the perspectives of all the interested parties."

Banks need to understand

Gender workshops are also in the pipeline.

"We will have a big training next year with involvement from other countries like Sweden and Spain. We plan different sessions for different people; journalists, people from the male dominated business sector, people from the regional authorities and from the banks. Banks need to understand that women ask for other types of loans than men."

New cooperatives

The pandemic has been an obstacle for many cooperatives. But in the rural areas of Thessaloniki, a group of younger women have started Eco Routes www.ecoroutes.gr They offer walking tours in the forests and mountains, in other places of importance for the eco life or of historical interest.

"They could not open for tourists this year but hope it will be possible in 2022. For tourists it's not easy to find hikes like this on their own so I think it can be a success. This year, during the pandemic, they have arranged Saturdays in the forests for families with children between six and ten. There were some learning activities for both children and adults and games for everyone. Each family paid a small fee and it worked out very nicely."



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In Katerini the cooperative Peri Ergon works with both refugees and unemployed Greek persons.

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"The refugees live isolated in camps outside the town and do nothing except wait for papers. Here a small number of them can meet and interact with others and also get a small income from sewing bags, tablecloths or other items. They have also produced masks for the hospital staff which was highly appreciated."

No system for microcredits

Popi Sourmaidou has been fighting for microcredits for many years but still there is no system for this in Greece.

"I am furious about that because I really think that could help", she says. "We will keep on fighting for that. And for other possibilities for women to earn a living by creating their own jobs. I do this because I like it and enjoy seeing the results."

Woman Cooperatives in Greece

- The woman cooperatives in Greece started in 1980s through the support of the General Secretary of Gender Equality
- They are linked to some agricultural initiatives even from 1950s
- Several programs/projects in 1990s and early 2000s increased their number to 160
- Today after several ups and downs only the half of them survived. Main negative factor was the consequences for the huge socio-economic crisis in Greece

Areas of activity

- Food and especially traditional food (different from area to area)
- Handicrafts
- Agrotourism
- New type of activities only recently and mainly after the new law about social economy e.g. working with social issues like refugees, eco-activities, IT, cultural activities etc
- The Social Cooperative Enterprise (SCE) was introduced in Greece by Law 4/2011 as a particular form of civil cooperative with an explicit social purpose

