



Name of the company: Crafts Village Comana, Paper Mill

Country: Romania

Size of the business: 14 employees

Website: <https://satulmestesugurilor.ro/>

Video link:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sKoQa9zwRoc&list=PLdje12QA_mgy3ZRVu_ki8h2Tm2YD17E4Tx

Background

Comana Crafts Village it is a project that organically grew from the activities of an NGO, called Paper Mill. This project was later financed by the Norwegian Government, through the Norway Financial Mechanism in 2014, within the financing domain Innovation in Green Industry - Romania. This daring project presents seven crafts that together changed the local area for the better through: workshops of wood work, reedmace processing, pottery, weaving and embroidery, traditional milling, blacksmith's workshop, as well as the processing of fruit and vegetables. The main activity is the teaching of pupils about old traditional Romanian crafts and arts across a complex of different workshops, built close to each other, within the Comana village, a place where tourists visit to also discover an old, local monastery and the protected forest and Neajlov river delta. The manufactured products, such as manual paper, small wooden souvenirs, hats and bags from straw and reed grass and traditional textile products are sold in the nearby libraries.



A kitchen with traditional food recipes is found nearby the buildings for course attendees and visitors. As a result of the measures from the COVID-19 pandemic, Crafts Village's courses have been adapted to online versions and were supported and funded by the involvement of other learning institutions. Despite several difficulties the activity of the people involved continued and the products were also sold online including a new product called "Cărțișor" ("little book"). The name comes from "Mărțișor" ("Little March) - relating to an old Romanian custom whereby women were given small objects bounded with red and white ropes at the beginning of spring, in March.

Funding

At the very beginning of the business, there was an initial sum provided from bank credit. After the investments of its own resources, the paper mill NGO searched to fund its actions and further development plans through public and development projects. The main funding factor that helped the project to grow was the existence of relevant grants and rules that were available at that point. In the meantime, the rules have changed, and on further calls for similar actions the organisation was not deemed to be compliant with the new demands. An example of this changing funding landscape is the construction of a manual paper workshop, which was initially financed under the first edition of a Romanian Governmental Program. In the second year, the rules and eligibility criteria changed and the construction could not be financed anymore. Therefore, in the beginning the most important thing was to identify the correct opportunity and concentrate all efforts to apply for the funding.

The organisation is monitoring all programs that are available to apply to and will choose very well the calls that are aligned with the mission of the organization. The writing of applications and involvement in external funding/grants is not just to be able to win some money but rather to fulfill the clear objectives of the organization. For example, the organization wrote an application called "Start-up Nation", that would have supported the establishment of new companies but was ultimately not submitted because it was clear that the project implementation would actually slow down the proposed development goals. The organization is focused on accessing funds that allow it to grow organically in line with its priorities and objectives.

What makes this case innovative?

The organisation always adapted its strategy to be unique and to discover new opportunities. Since the beginning of the business the owners preferred to avoid competition and instead offer an alternative. If somebody wants to replicate this business case they would need to study the exact characteristics and opportunities within their specific local, rural region. At the Crafts Village there is a specific space with dedicated personnel for every workshop on offer. The diversification of the performed activities is also what sets the village apart from other business who do not have such a widespread of courses/activities. For example, the pottery workshop available does not focus on the potter wheel since this is offered by other



competitors but instead focuses on other elements that are more difficult for competitors to replicate. The current trend of seeking natural and authentic activities indicates that this market is continually growing. However, it must be said that since there are often common objectives between those that work in promoting traditional crafts, the approach is more collaborative than competitive, and if there is a specialised craft or activity that is not offered by the Village, then they will happily recommend one of the “competitors”.

Besides the geographical position, another important key resource is the involvement of volunteers in the activities.

Lessons learnt

This business case is an example and an encouragement for those who want to follow their dreams and build something sustainable for others. It has a stronger focus on cultural activities, rural development and social enterprises, rather than the purely economic benefits. It is a demonstration of the sharing paradox: sharing with others doesn't consume all resources, it instead helps to produce more for further sharing.

