

Project Gypsy MaMa

The problem description:

This project is focused on the young people (under 25 years old) from the socially isolated area of Brno called the “Brno Bronx” which is home to approximately 6000 Roma people. The main problem for this group is long term unemployment due to the accumulation of many disadvantages: basic schooling, lack of work experience and skills, pervasive pathological phenomena, and racial prejudices. The unemployment rate of this group is 90%. Maintaining this group even at the bottom edge of poverty costs the state enormous resources. If things continue this way, those young people will remain dependent on social welfare along with their parents, and maybe the next generation. The issue is that it is an undignified waste of human potential.

According to research and adjusting for the age distribution of the town, there are at least 800 people from the target group living in the “Brno Bronx” area. The area between Cejl and Francouzská street is regarded as a “bad neighborhood” and has the highest concentration of gambling houses, 24 hour bars, and pawnshops. Teenagers and adolescents are especially endangered by socially pathological phenomena such as drugs, black market labor, gambling, and related street crime. There is emergent child prostitution as well.

Young women are pushed into early motherhood by their family in order to increase the social support and grants available. That is their only solution and results in their isolation from society which furthers their dependence on welfare. That is why this project has part time jobs as well.

The traditional and prevalent approach of social services in this area is focused on educational workshops and consultancy, and is unable to address the area living conditions effectively. It does not engage the creative potential of young Roma people, nor the community as a whole.

Summary of the solution:

This project helps address the problem by harnessing the creative potential and the natural desire of self-fulfillment of the young people of the Roma community. It creates an environment where they are appreciated both within and without of their community, and provides society with an opportunity to enjoy affordable, original, and ethically produced fashion. It uses social enterprise as tool for implementation, and sustainability. The social enterprise is based on an innovation in fashion that has a range of multiplying effects for the development of the target group both in the Roma community, and in society in general.

General project goals:

Increase the quality of life of the target group and the Roma community in Brno’s socially excluded area
Establish ties between the Roma community and mainstream society, and strengthen social reconciliation and mutual cultural enrichment in Brno and The Czech Republic in general.

Project phases:

June – August 2015: equipment procurement, Restart shop setup, creation of two collections of fashion, worker recruitment, web site creation

September 2015: shop opening, fashion shows, began production of Gypsy MaMa fashion

Current condition and organizational structure:

The project is implemented by the non-profit organization Tripitaka. An official partner of the project is DROM – Roma Centre that offers social services for young people from the area. We cooperate with them on the recruitment of workers and volunteers from the target group for the social enterprise.

Workers:

1x Manager of the shop and brand

3x Workers from the target group: sales, production, events

Volunteers: fashion designers, Roma artists: (dancers, models, painters), photographer, make-up artist, public relation, designers of Restart retail

External suppliers: material, textile prints, sewing for the more difficult parts of clothing, accountancy firm

Co-operative organizations: DROM - Roma Centre, Museum of Roma Culture, other independent fashion producers, municipal authorities of Brno - promotion, School of textile and clothing designs, NaZemi – ethics in the garment industry

Currently we employ Zaneta (19), Filip (17), and Tomas(16) from the local Roma community. They each have a six month contract. Their manager is also their social worker and she develops their skills continuously in order to be able to find their next job after the half year is completed. We are planning on employing another six employees from the target group for longer terms with further development of the social enterprise. It is set this way because we want to help more people from the socially excluded area.

We sell Gypsy MaMa items in the Restart shop, in the Museum of Roma Culture, on the web, and at events, and festivals. We have an ethical codex of production: we buy material only from Czech suppliers and we pay close attention to the ecological aspects of production processes in our manufactory as well as in those of our suppliers.

Financing:

The running costs of the enterprise were granted by The Velux Foundation. They provide financing for worker wages, the wage of manager, the rent for the shop, and manufacturing costs. This support is budgeted until June 2017. We have a contract with the foundation that includes an agreement that the profit be used half for further development of the project, and half as reserve for after June 2017. The start of the project, buying machines and material were also financed from the resources of Tripitaka.

Results from September to December 2015:

Sales are increasing every month and thanks to the support of the Telex Foundation the enterprise produces profit. To reach financial independence in this structure we would need to double sales on average by mid 2017. That is a real and achievable goal. We have sold over 400 items over the first four months.

We fully developed two collections of fashion, organized four fashion shows, and were selling at many different events including Brno Christmas Markets, DjungoFest – festival of Gypsy Jazz, and Factory Fashion Market. We have involved 20 volunteers. We did two press releases that gave rise to 10 media spots with audiences in the thousands. Restart retail was visited by approximately 1200 people over four months.

Goals up to 2017:

We are planning to employ another six people from the target group in 2016. We plan to create and start selling two new fashion sets, and expand distribution to Prague. We aim to increase the efficiency of production and volume of sales with the newly introduced lines. We are also looking forward to

participating in many festivals and shows throughout the Czech Republic.

Description of the innovative solution:

Novelty:

Coming up with an unexpected innovation in the fashion industry and connecting it with social work is a unique solution for an often ignored target group. It aims particularly at young unemployed mothers living in socially excluded areas. In contrast to traditional techniques of social work, this project views the problem as a lack of personal and cultural self-fulfilment for the target group.

Innovation in Accessing Target Groups – Involvement:

The project contributes long-standing integration into labor market for the target group. Meaningful, and creative work allows the target group to fulfil their potential and uplifts the whole Roma community. The target group is involved by applying their skills with an emphasis on skill development and creativity. There is an improvement in the perception of the target group by the majority because Gypsy MaMa sells across all sections of society. The public then can see that the Roma community is not passive, but productive, and is able to enrich the whole of society.

Innovation in the implementation of the Project – Effectiveness:

The project uses the tools of social enterprise with a trailblazing and highly creative product - the Gypsy MaMa brand brings a large scale of multiplying effects. Evidence of the positive social impact can be seen in the increasing interest of the public, increasing sales, and interest of the media. The solution engages diverse fields and disciplines such as fashion designing, social work, entrepreneurship, and even museology - Museum of Roma Culture.

Innovation in Public Perception – Serving as an Example:

The innovation comes from the local environment of the socially excluded area and its Roma community, they are inseparable. There is an emerging dialogue among the local community, local organisations that offers social services, Museum of Roma Culture, School of clothing and textile design located in the area. This dialogue is open further for media, municipal authorities, the public, and other friendly non-profit organisations focused on fair and ethical practices in fashion e.g. NaZemi. Local politicians know about the project and support it. They provided 16 billboards, owned by the city, for free. Every single event connected with Gypsy MaMa is followed by interest from local media. There were reports on Czech Television, on the radio, in the local press and in internet and social media news.