

Green Entrepreneurship

Successful business cases of Green Entrepreneurs in the Mediterranean



Regional Activity Centre
for Cleaner Production



Cangiari: Ethics and Sustainable High Fashion clothes made in Italy

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Name:	Cangiari
City, country:	Reggio Calabria, Italy
Name of entrepreneur/ founder:	Vincenzo Linarello

Description

CANGIARI is a brand belonging to the GOEL Consortium of social cooperatives. A few cooperatives operating within the consortium in the textile sector joined forces to create the CANGIARI brand, which later allowed other partners that embraced its ethical standards to join in. At the heart of the brand is the concept of social inclusion, which is crucial for the cooperatives involved in GOEL. This is because Made in GOEL is itself a B-type cooperative, a social enterprise legally obliged to have 30% of its workforce listed as coming from 'disadvantaged groups', usually people with disabilities.

Made in GOEL is involved in two main activities under the tutoring of Santo Versace, brother of the deceased stylist. The first one is the ancient art of weaving, which the women who work for ARACNE –the cooperative that runs this strand of work– have learned from practiced older women; the second one is the design and production of high-end fashion clothes by Made in GOEL itself.

'Cangiari' means 'to change' in the dialects of Calabria and Sicily, and the meaning implies changing both the world –and particularly the fashion world– and oneself. The CANGIARI logo resembles the mathematical symbol representing diversity: it embodies in this context the project's desire to be different from all other fashion brands. Each CANGIARI item of clothing carries a message to its buyer that speaks of human rights, equality, participation, common goods, ecology and peace. Its strapline –'Beauty is different'– wants to stimulate a reflection on the beauty (and not just the equity) of a brand that is based on respect for human beings and for nature.

This is the reason why CANGIARI textiles are for the most part organically-certified: for the cooperative, social values have to walk hand-in-hand with environmental respect.

Investment

Start up capital: EUR 300,000 from Vodafone Foundation, EUR 20,000 from Banca di Credito Coopetarivo (BCC) of Alzate Brianza, EUR 5,000 from BCC of Sesto San Giovanni and EUR 10,000 from BCC Federazione Calabrese.

Sources of funding: Fondazione Vodafone granted a EUR 300,000 grant through a public call, while the rest of the funding came from a number of cooperative banks affiliated to the BCC consortium. The brand received considerable non-financial help from a number of firms, including free legal advice on brand registration, free interior design for its showroom and free communication support. Accenture alone –the renowned multinational– offered EUR 70,000 worth of consultancies in business and financial planning.

Stakeholders

Disabled individuals;
The inhabitants of the Southern region of Calabria which suffer from high unemployment rates and have been badly hit by the outsourcing of production activities abroad;
Women weavers and other workers;
Those who benefit from the communication campaign of CANGIARI aiming at re-generating the area both economically and socially;
Those wealthier individuals who live in Calabria and who can –through the simple act of purchasing an item of clothing– express their concern for the local situation and their desire to support a process of change.

Employment generation

Number of direct employees: 18.
Number of regularly-employed external collaborators: 10.

Timeline

The social consortium GOEL was born in 2003, after a 10-year long process of territorial advocacy and awareness raising led by Bishop Monsignor Giancarlo Maria Bregantini, who –born in the Trentino region where the social cooperative movement is very strong– believed this to be an important tool to fight against social exclusion and unemployment. These first 10 years were crucial in creating the setting for the consortium to be born, and especially in persuading a number of people that social change was indeed possible.

Only a few small cooperatives were created at first, mainly working with former inmates and the sons of 'Ndrangheta bosses who were trying to break free of their mafia-dominated upbringing. Their limited size did not prevent them from having a strong impact in Calabria. A few years later, Bishop Bregantini created the free info-point CREA LAVORO, which supported the start-up and creation of social enterprises and social cooperatives. Finally, in 2003 the GOEL consortium was set up, in order to provide follow-up support to those social enterprises and cooperatives that were born thanks to the info-point. The name GOEL comes from the Bible and means 'Redeemer', thus symbolizing the role that the consortium would like to play in the region as 'enabler' and redeeming actor, especially in support of those individuals who are less autonomous and able to defend themselves.

The consortium is primarily made up of 'A-type' and 'B-type' cooperatives located in the Locride areas and in the Gioia Tauro plains. The former deliver services that are specifically aimed at vulnerable groups, while the latter are normal enterprises, with the only difference that a percentage of its workforce is made up of individuals that suffer from some form of disability or social problem.

The consortium recently joined forces under the common umbrella body of the GOEL Cooperative Group with two other social cooperatives, GOELBIO and Made in GOEL, both born to manage specific economic strands. Made in GOEL is the cooperative that manages the CANGIARI brand. It brings together those cooperatives responsible for the production and marketing of CANGIARI products. Born in 2009 in Milan under the auspices of the Italian National Fashion Chamber (which organizes amongst other things Milan Fashion Week), CANGIARI secured through a public procurement process a location for its first store in Milan: a flat once belonging to a Mafia boss, and later confiscated by the State when the boss was arrested. The flat became not only CANGIARI's show-room, but also a cultural space that aims to raise awareness in Milan and beyond on issues such as social justice and environmental sustainability.

Twice a year, CANGIARI takes part in Milan's Fashion Week. In May 2010 it was one of only two enterprises –amongst 60 participants– awarded a special recognition at Paris' Sustainable Luxury Fair. The prize was awarded on the basis of its social and environmental responsibility, as well as of the value and refined quality of its products. On 17 July 2010 CANGIARI was awarded the 'Fashion and Society' prize at the International Fashion Fair 'Catania, Talenti & Dintorni'.

Feasibility study	The feasibility plan, encompassing both Italy and abroad, was drafted by Accenture. The industrial plan is in progress.
Geo-social-economic setting	Not available.
Key features	Strong environmental concern and sustainability drive in all production processes. Use of traditional weaving machines and of techniques that were progressively being lost in the area, but which have now been passed on to younger generations. Strong ethical commitment towards fighting the Mafia and towards encouraging political participation.
Overall rational and motivation	Not available.
Strenghts	Very high craftsmanship; Use of organic materials in all production; ICEA Global Textile Standard: adoption of an international certification standard –ICEA (Certificazione Etica e Ambientale)– based on the Global Organic Textile Standard (GOTS), which ensures very high standards in terms of employee protection and security, energy conservation, waste management, etc. The entire production chain is made up of social cooperatives as defined above. Strong communication ethics.
Challenges and constraints	The main challenge is to be able to compete in the high-end fashion market with traditional profit-making bodies that do not have the kind of background, social objectives and financial constraints that CANGIARI has. While other luxury fashion brands can spend a lot of money on marketing and advertisement, CANGIARI has none of their liquidity. In addition, the region where the production is based is in itself a challenge, because of its physical remoteness, its ruggedness and its poor infrastructure, which are mainly overcome today by the sheer ingenuity, passion and commitment of all those involved in the project.
Direct activities and Impacts	<i>Social:</i> social regeneration of a region and its people; <i>Environmental:</i> commitment towards choices that minimize environmental impact; use of renewable energies whenever possible; <i>Economic:</i> job creation and preservation of ancient weaving techniques.
Use of innovative Technologies	Most innovation has happened in the area of weaving tools techniques, some of which have been copied from ancient tradition –especially in the case of linen items– while others have instead been adapted to modern standards and needs. Vital in this sense was the pro-bono support offered to CANGIARI by Riccardo Bruni from LYRIA, a textile company specialized in the production of textiles for the high end fashion market.
Evidence of a holistic approach/world view	CANGIARI sees its environmental commitment as fully integrated to its social aim. The one could not exist without the other one. An ethical approach sees man as part of nature, but also as part of complex social, political and economic webs that need to be made visible and opposed when they belong to criminal organisations like the Mafia. CANGIARI sees its role not just as locally-rooted Southern Italian enterprise, but also as campaigner in Northern Italy and abroad about the deep linkages between economic systems, politics and criminality worldwide.

Scale of benefits

The economic and environmental benefits are mainly perceived locally. The growing hope for change is mainly felt locally. The growing awareness about this land and the causes of its economic woes are felt locally and nationally. GOEL's analysis stems from the realization that there is a tight linkage between economic woes and criminality in this area of Italy (but not only). Elements that elsewhere would be considered rights (the right to access healthcare, the right to employment, the right to a transparent public administration), here are considered privileges, which are granted to people in need in exchange for votes. These individual lose their freedom and live in a state of eternal dependency. Votes are packaged and sold separately to political parties. The money raised by these transaction does not stay locally –this would enable the local economy to develop– but is sent to the North of the country, where it pollutes the markets and the local economy. This picture is confirmed by years of investigation by the Italian juridical system, yet it hardly ever trickles down to the public conscience. Raising awareness of these economic dynamics and of the role that a project like CANGIARI can play in opposing them remains one of the objectives of the GOEL consortium.

Policies, incentives and regulations needed

In consideration of the complexity of the themes that GOEL deals MENA region with –social inequality, social injustice, linkages between criminal organizations, politics, economic sectors and social problems– it would be impossible to answer this question concisely. There are many policies that need to be amended in order to enable social change and sustainability to flourish in a region like Calabria and a country like Italy.

Lessons and recommendations

The first lesson is that social entrepreneurship –even at times of economic hardship like the ones we live in– can pay. CANGIARI's turnover has consistently grown over the last few years. A project like CANGIARI is very important for a region like Calabria in Southern Italy, where a local economic development model is locally-rooted and ensures results and benefits are shared and spread in terms of social inclusion and economic growth.

References

Manuela Sfondrini – Direzione Area Produttiva
Gruppo Cooperativo GOEL
Tel.: + 39 340 0920982