

Welcoming international colleagues for the project “Social Economy without borders: cooperation opportunities”

In the period 06-08th of October Study Visit and Conference were organized in Skopje, North Macedonia as second activity under the Visegrad funded project [“Social Economy without borders”](#).

The 1st project activity was a week-long internship and seminar that were organized in Poland in September 2019 with the aim of exchanging good practices on social entrepreneurship within the 4 partner countries. In the same manner, the Macedonian project partners: Organization for Social Innovation- ARNO (in collaboration with: Association Solem, Ljubeznost, Misla, Social Integration & Empowerment Centre – SIEC and AHP Prilep) organized 3-days agenda for sharing good practices and knowledge exchange for the future development of social economy and the economy of solidarity in the region. The project partners (Barka Foundation- Poland, project coordinator, Salvation Army- Czech Republic, and Municipality Revfulop - Hungary; Municipality of Krobia – project partners) nominated representatives of their institutions which took part in the designed activities in Skopje.

The Study Visits in Skopje (6-7th of October) were organized to provide direct contact with Social Enterprises and local government. As part of the visit guests met:

- The SE “ESNAF” (Creative Macedonia) located right on St.Makedonija, and learned about their social mission and business model on selling high quality handcrafts for helping marginalized people (while also employing person that fights malignant disease)
- NGO “Solem” and their SE activity “Handicrafts for you” where they got to meet the clients of SOLEM, people with disabilities who create the products; and participate in discussion for presenting the state of work in the country with opportunities on networking
- SE “Kopce” and Red Cross Skopje where the guests had opportunity to visit the second-hand clothes shop, the background process of selecting and preparing the clothes for sale, and moreover to learn about this SE activity of the Red Cross, and learn also about the other impactful activities carried by the Red Cross in provision of services to the most vulnerable groups in the society such as the home care, trainings for home-care providers etc.
- Restaurant “Umbrella”, one of the tastiest visits in a restaurant that provides job training and employment for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities that prepare great food and welcome everyone with a smile.
- The Municipality of “Shuto Orizari”, first municipality in the world with a majority Roma population where the mayor Mr. Kurto Dudush and its professional team presented their past work and achievements, and discussed challenges, important aspects and potentials of joint work in future, with highlight on cooperation at municipal level with the representatives from the municipality of Krobia and the deputy mayor from the sub region Gostin (both in Poland).
- The NGO “Humanost” and its SE “HumanaS” that is offering vocational training and certification via special program for elderly care in order to provide quality and professional

service providers in the home, and employment opportunity to marginalized people. The CEO, Sashe Jovanov provided their good practices on cooperation and support mechanism of few municipalities that are working closely with.

The Conference was held on 08th of October in Skopje under the title “Social Economy without borders: cooperation opportunities”. The conference was opened by Ms. Barbara Sadowska from Barka Foundation from Poland (project coordinator) who shared her passion on working again in Macedonian context and presented the system of social entrepreneurship in Poland. The session was followed by presentation of Mr. Sebastian Czwojda -Deputy Mayor of Subregion Gostyn (Poland), Ms. Anna Krzyzostaniak, Welfare Office of Krobia (Poland), Mr. Premysl Kramerius, the Salvation Army (Czech Republic) and Ms. Renata Mizera, Center for Social Integration (Poland). The goal of this session was to provide visibility of the role of local municipalities in empowering of SE/public procurement and to share good practices in the given context.

The agenda was followed by short presentations and reflection points of the macedonian delegation that took part in the 1st project activity- the study visit and seminar organized in September 2019 in Poland.

Irina Janevska (ARNO); Iskra Roso (Solem); Toni Stankovski (Ljubeznost); Gordana Rodic (SIEC); Dimitar Ilchov (Misla) presented their work and inspiration that they took from the visit in Poland. Main highlights in the reflections were: very developed market and entrepreneurial high quality products visible in the SE context in Poland, openness of institutions, interest of mayors and strong local will for support of SEs, strong connections among local actors, and the role of Barka Foundation in paving the way for integration of the most vulnerable through SE modeling (true and honest approach in their 30 years of operation).

The second part of the conference was designed to ensure additional space for showroom of other Macedonian SEs:

- NGO Eco-logic that presented their SE „ Zhabec” and their amazing work (and products) with children and youth in educational and environmental activities,
- NGO “H.E.R.A” presented the SE “Nega Plus” that delivers home care by training and employing women from the Roma community and their program „ Creating opportunities” that further supports creation of SEs that target the Roma minorities,

- The Humanitarian Organization “Aid for Handicapped and the Poor” from Prilep that presented their SE work with production of bio-pellets and recycling facilities that are run as economic activity,
- AvAv Hepi Dog –the first private Eco-friendly Amusement Doggy Park in the country, for dogs and their owners which is formed as a social enterprise made entirely of recycled materials that further provides support and sheltering for homeless dogs
- “Pedal” Social Cycling Center -a place for bicycles service and maintenance, that provides training for self-maintenance of bicycles and sale of bicycle spare parts and related products, while also donating repaired bicycles to vulnerable citizens.

The last session of the conference featured a panel with participation of prominent experts: Ms. Sofija Spasovska (Minsitry of Labor and Social Policy), Ms. Klimentina Ilijevski (Public), Mr. Gjogji Kushevski (CEED Hub), Mr. Michal Listwon (Deputy Mayor of Krobia/PL), Mr. Gerard Misiaczyk (Director of Workshop for Disabled of Piaski/ PL). The moderator of the panel Ms. Nikica Kusinikova (Konekt) set questions to the panelists that contributed to the discussion of creating opportunities for development of SE, with aspects on legislation, support structures, financing system, public procurement. The paneled was followed by open discussion with all conference participants and ended with short summary and encouraged networking opportunity among the participants.

The conference was attended by 60 representatives of NGOs, SEs, embassy, donor, municipal and institutional representatives, passionate future social entrepreneurs.

“What I want to share, as a personal impression from these latest project activities, is that yes, as a country we do face many challenges, and many of us are tired of the invested efforts, unfulfilled dreams and promises, past and the SE road ahead. But what is stimulating, and opens up a space for reflection and joint work, is the collaboration at the local level, shared commitment, sharing of resources and capacities. In this regard, the project partners also recommended to do more local bonds and joint advocacy, common requests to municipalities, patience and endurance. We really do hope that “Social Economy without borders” project will open up new roads, remove motivational borders and create new friendships for stronger local and international SE system.” -stated Irina Janevska from ARNO.

Next project activities envisage study visits to Czech Republic, Hungary, International conference in Poland and production of online brochure with collected case studies from the project partners.