



Handmade Albania - A touch of beauty from Albania

The project Handmade Albania by a team of young technology-savvy people committed to social innovation and entrepreneurship is awarded First Prize in the Albanian National Business Plan Competition - OECD Investment Compact for South East Europe, METE, AIDA, with the support of the European Union.

“In a world of sameness people are looking for unique expressions of their individuality and are willing to pay a premium for products that are not mass-produced and exhibit a cultural identity. On the other hand, talented artists – artisans – in Albania are capable of creating beautiful hand-crafted products but are unable to reach remote markets. We are technology-savvy and have a passion for offering artisans enhanced opportunities and consumers increased happiness with products that address their concerns for authenticity, distinctive design, and superior functionality. We create not only a commercial connection, but also an emotional one between maker and user, and that is the key to our future success” – Handmade Albania Team led by Erjon Curraj

I am happy and proud to lead a team of brilliant young people with original ideas and committed to innovation that could bring about positive change in the Albanian society. It is with great pleasure that I am writing this success story as our project “Handmade Albania – A touch of beauty from Albania”, developed within the principles of a social entrepreneurship, won the First Prize in the Albania Business Plan Competition 2012, organized by the OECD Investment Compact for South East Europe, the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Energy and the Albanian Investment Development Agency supported by the European Union in November 2012. Our project was selected as the best one amongst other high quality projects and will receive technical support from the OECD Investment Compact for South East Europe in the form of business consulting support, feasibility studies and market research assistance to help launch our business plan.

The team who developed the project and the business plan is composed of:

Erjon Curraj, PhD Candidate

ICTs Director - European University of Tirana

Research Fellow in ICT and Social Innovation – UET Centre for Development and Research

Fabjan Lashi, MSc

Master of Science in Information Technology and Economy - European University of Tirana

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 Arianita Toçi, BA

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Handmade Albania was conceived during an event to promote entrepreneurship, Start-up Weekend – Tirana, which took place in May 2012. The core idea of this business is to create a web portal for marketing hand-crafted products while guaranteeing the authenticity of the product.

Social involvement and participation of young people in commercial activity, as well as the component of rural area development, remain a strong foundation and meaningful motivator for us. Another important aspect is the increase of awareness of Albania through increased access to products Made in Albania. This project goal is to sell handmade and artisanal products crafted in Albania online to other markets. This can be achieved by following our objectives:

- a) creating jobs, for women and artisans in general, working from home and gaining access to extensive markets through the online portal;
- b) social involvement and participation of young people in commercial activity, as well as the component of rural area development;
- c) increase of awareness, and promotion of Albania through increased access to the authentic Made in Albania products.

The project involves multi-faceted innovation as follows:

- a) process innovation, through special handling of the entire process: from accepting the order, to launching an online bid process, receiving the product at the central office, assessing the quality, and finally sending it to the end user. The reverse auction idea has been widely used for years in the B2B space, and the situation we intend to create – a wide supplier base working out of their homes competing with each other – should lend itself to this application for the retail market of highly customized, individualized, or even made-to-order items;
- b) technological innovation, by using advanced ecommerce and e-marketing methods for sales, supporting features well-known in other product spaces, such as: recommendation of related products, wish lists, client suggestions for new products, etc.;
- c) product innovation, by accepting orders for specific designs or features and continually assessing customer preferences to increase repeat orders and to accelerate demand for new products introduced in accordance with those customer preferences.

The positive social impact of the business, creating economic opportunities for people in rural areas and young generation, is the core motivation of my team, we came together quickly and learned to work together in just a few hours over a single weekend, during Start-up Albania.