

Entrepreneurial women redesigning a small-town services market

Company: Parostatek Social Cooperative

What was the challenge?

Cieszyn - a charming, historic border-town in southern Poland on the east bank of the Olza River, is a place full of wonders and hidden gems. However, with only few big employers being located in vicinity, it presents many challenges for young women returning to work after maternity leave.

One particular group of young women, who insisted that they do not want to leave Cieszyn to find jobs that would match their experience and ambition, decided to take matters into their own hands and create jobs that would give them the opportunity for professional self-realisation in accordance with their values, needs and education. They started by mapping out their own skills and competences and looking at how those could make a sustainable and viable business that would provide them with a stable employment.

They decided to set up the Parostatek Social Cooperative, a creative training centre offering workshops for businesses, third sector organisations and kids. There are also two specialized services brands operating under the cooperative framework – Dinky, a design and illustrator studio and the bio-building Living Architecture studio.



How design helped?

Design has been central part of Parostatek's strategy from the very beginning. To define target customer groups and develop the offer, they teamed up with service designer Wojtek Ławniczak from Very Human Services. They conducted a research of the needs of Cieszyn businesses and residents, and also looked at a broader, national market. They created a completely new range products and services that were not available on the local market before as a response to user needs. In addition, thanks to design thinking method, the Parostatek's founders have discovered completely new applications for their skills.

Wojtek helped to embed design thinking into the cooperative management process and showed the team how it can be applied to conducting business activities and constantly evolving the offer. Now, Parostatek and its products are widely recognizable brands known for creativity, interdisciplinarity and high quality service. They are attracting clients from all over the country and markets that they had not even imagined before.



What is the impact?

Thanks to the Parostatek initiative and success, the women not only achieved their main goal – to be able to stay in their hometown while fulfilling their professional ambitions, but also had a major impact on the local market. Cieszyn is a small town and as such, highly specialized and strategic training and design services were not available to local businesses before. As a social enterprise, Parostatek emphasizes its role as not just a service provider but mostly as a centre of transfer of knowledge and skills. Their experience and knowledge improve the whole business ecosystem in the region.

The team believes that the whole undertaking would not be possible without design thinking approach, thanks to which they can operate locally while offering specialized and innovative services. In this way, they contribute to a more sustainable and balanced economic development helping local businesses being more competitive. Parostatek is also an important institution for design graduates from the School of Art of the University of Silesia that is located in Cieszyn. Internships at the cooperative give them a great opportunity to gain new experience in cooperation with exciting clients.

The creative approach and high level of service of Parostatek was recognized in the regional design contest. In 2014, the team was awarded the Silesian Icon title in the category of service design.



New jobs created

Design4Innovation partner: Marshal's Office Silesian Voivodeship
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