2024

WINNER

Gender Equality

Watch the interview

FRAU iDA – Space for women entrepreneurs

Promoting women in rural areas, making their achievements more visible, improving their framework conditions, and providing them with opportunities to combine family and career.

EAFRD-funded projects

Location: Zwettl, Lower Austria, Austria

Programming period: 2014-2020

Priority: P6 - Social inclusion and local development

Focus Area: Local development

Measures: M19 - LEADER CLLD

Funding:

Total budget	171 387 (EUR)
EAFRD	109 688 (EUR)
National/Regional	370 (EUR)
Private/Own funds	20 000 (EUR)
Non-EU funding sources (membership fees, sponsoring and interim financing from Raiffeisenbank)	41 329 (EUR)

Timeframe: 19/03/2019 - ongoing

Project promoter: Waldviertler Frauenwirtschaft

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Summary

Under the FRAU iDA brand, the Waldviertler Frauenwirtschaft association offers modern, flexible offices, workspaces and meeting, practice and event rooms spanning nearly 400m². These spaces are available for short- or long-term use regardless of industry affiliation. Despite high demand, the association continues to follow a 'women first' concept, prioritising permanent office rentals for women to support them. Collaboration with childcare and elderly care facilities enhances work-life balance for tenants, with childcare and daycare centres just minutes away.

Women entrepreneurs pay a small yearly fee to join FRAU iDA, which is partially reimbursed in the form of educational vouchers to attend courses at the location. In addition, the diverse professionals and services organised at FRAU iDA foster new collaborations and the exchange of ideas in a professional setting.

Regular networking meetings, which are free and open to anyone interested, allow the exchange of ideas and opportunities for new connections. The offer includes an ongoing seminar programme for women and personal support through a mentoring programme.

FRAU iDA helps young women to claim roles and career steps for themselves, inspiring them through role models to make smart life choices that will help them become more economically independent.

Project results

- Two jobs created
- Five individual offices
- 15 flexible and fixed workplaces
- Coaching room, meeting room, event room, two practice rooms
- 31 people provided with workplaces, 22 people currently working at FRAU iDA

Three mentoring programmes successfully implemented, one leading to a start-up.

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Motivating women to continue their education – members of the Waldviertel Women's Business Association receive half of their membership fee (EUR 60) back in the form of vouchers for educational courses taking place at FRAU iDA. The courses cover a variety of topics, ranging from business to physical and mental health, and the vouchers are valid for a whole year.

- 8-10 lectures/workshops each year in further education, average of 15 participants.
- 12 free seminars every year on women's health, 400 participants in total.
- 12 free networking meetings, 20 participants at each.

Raised awareness of gender equality, women's physical, mental and financial health

Key lessons and recommendations

Creating a central feel-good place for women entrepreneurs where they can exchange ideas in an appreciative manner and receive their customers in a professional and modern working environment.

Fostering regular exchange, cooperation, encouragement and mutual support among all members of the FRAU iDA community.

Skills transfer with the FRAU iDA further training and mentoring programmes and the pool of experts.

Working with the younger generation, helping young women claim roles and career steps for themselves, inspiring them through role models to become more economically independent, and supporting young female doctoral students conducting research work on coworking spaces.

Context

As early as 2014, a forecast was made for the Waldviertel region that there would be a shortage of around 18 000 workers by 2030. Many self-employed women were also working part-time from home to look after their children, but they were not perceived as entrepreneurs and their economic success was limited by their part-time self-employed status, particularly since there was no childcare in the entire district in 2014. The project's aim was to improve the framework conditions for working women to enable them to participate in the labour market and to make the achievements of women visible.

As a first step, the Apfelbäumchen daycare centre for children from the age of one upwards was founded in 2015, and in 2018, planning began for the visible business location FRAU iDA – Raum für Unternehmerinnen ('a space for businesswomen'). FRAU iDA also makes it possible to enjoy quality of life in rural areas without having to give up an urban job. Initially planned for the female entrepreneur target group, the pandemic has shown that those working from home often missed public workspaces and networks. For this reason, the target group was expanded, but with women given priority for the space available. The coworking offer includes an attractive and varied training programme, individual coaching sessions and a monthly, free networking meeting for all interested parties, all in one location.

Objectives

The main priority was to promote women in rural areas, make their achievements more visible, improve their framework conditions and provide them with opportunities to combine family and career. Encouraging female founders and entrepreneurs through further training programmes and coaching, and women in general to develop personally and pursue their careers, was the primary goal.

FRAU iDA also looked to increase awareness of the living and working space in the region, promote it as a business location and use this as a driver to revitalise town centres and vacant properties to discourage people from moving away from rural areas. This would also involve reductions in CO2 emissions, with people not having to commute long distances to work.

There were also a number of networking opportunities, with the chance for self-employed and employed people to work together and also combat the threat of loneliness when working from home.

Activities

The first business plan was drawn up in July 2018, and this led to a search for a suitable, central location. The Waldviertel Women's Business Association was founded in March 2019, with board members divided into working groups handling events, location of equipment and financial matters. This was followed by an application for funding from the two LEADER regions of Waldviertler Grenzland and Südliches Waldviertel-Nibelungengau.

Two part-time employees were hired in January 2020, and in March of that year, the project held a kick-off event entitled 'Get to know & celebrate with FRAU iDA'.

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Networking and further education programmes have been ongoing since June 2020, with the offices and workplaces publicised and advertised in regional media, partner networks and social media. This began before the location opened to lay the foundations for building the community in advance. A six-month FRAU iDA further education programme was set up, including lectures and workshops, and is cheaper for members of the Waldviertel Women's Business Association via further education vouchers.

In May 2021, the interior design for the space was selected via a working group with an external interior designer, and at the same time, the first mentee began the FRAU iDA mentoring programme. Two more employees were taken on in October 2021, and this also marked the first time that the Columbus Prize for innovative women's projects was awarded.

The first mentoring programme was completed in February 2022 and three months later, the location was opened, with the first female tenants able to move into their offices and workstations.

The first members' event and open day were held in May 2022 and the project began to garner recognition, receiving a number of awards over the next 12 months (the equalitA 2022 award, the TRIGOS award, first place in the 'Regional Value Creation' category, and an award from the Wüstenrot Foundation Germany). A women's health project (FRAU SEiN) was also launched at the start of 2024.

The current rate of events is annual for membership events, open days and review meetings for all members, partners and stakeholders. Monthly blog articles are published, with regular updates on the project's website and social media channels and in local press.

Main results

In economic terms, two jobs have been created. Logistically, the project has set up five individual offices, 15 flexible and fixed workplaces, a coaching room, a meeting room, an event room and two practice rooms. Thirty-one people have been provided with workplaces that can be used flexibly by different people. There are currently 22 people working at FRAU iDA (either fixed or regularly flexible).

Three mentoring programmes have been successfully implemented, one of which led to a start-up company being founded.

Socially, the project has motivated women to continue their education with members of the Waldviertel Women's Business Association receiving half of their membership fee (EUR 60) back in the form of FRAU iDA further education vouchers. Eight to ten lectures or workshops take place each year in this further education category, each with an average of 15 participants.

Twelve free seminars are also run every year on women's health, with 400 participants in total, and 12 free networking meetings with around 20 participants at each one.

Socially, the project has raised awareness of gender equality and women's physical, mental and financial health. The creation of a central location has made women's achievements more visible whilst having the added benefit of revitalising the city centre as well as local catering and gastronomy businesses. It continues to foster a healthy work-life balance and encourage women to take the first steps in setting up their own businesses.

Key lessons

To have created a central feel-good place for entrepreneurs where they can exchange ideas in an appreciative manner and receive their customers in a professional and modern working environment has been one of the main successes of the project. It has also fostered regular exchange, cooperation, encouragement and mutual support among all members of the FRAU iDA community.

The skills transfer with the FRAU iDA further training and mentoring programmes and the pool of experts that has been created has proved invaluable.

Working with the younger generation has been key to encouraging development at an early stage. FRAU iDA helps young women to claim roles and career steps for themselves, inspiring them through role models to make smart life choices that will help them become more economically independent. The project also supports young female doctoral students conducting research work on coworking spaces.

Additional informations:

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