

CAREER TIPS

Are you looking to be a cultural entrepreneur?

For this interview, ENCATC spoke with Joëlle Yana, co-founder of La Tricoterie, a space for making connections in Brussels, Belgium. She shared with us her experience as a young entrepreneur and what she has learned from building her business and what she has taken away so far from the experience.



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ENCATC: What is the story behind La Tricoterie and why did you want to create this space?

Joëlle Yana: Xavier Campion and I met during our studies. For years we dreamed of a place where people, cultures, generations and disciplines could meet. First we first worked in other areas and sectors but we came back to our initial project idea. We looked for a place and we came across this formidable space. We decided to gather people around us, whether for the start of the project or for the renovation of the building. Hundreds of people came to help us over the course of many weekends to launch the project. It was great.

We wanted to create this project because we felt the need to regain a sense of meaning and "to act" by contributing to changing the world in which we live. In the wake of the anti- austerity movement, we wanted to seek solutions and become the "builders". In our view, these solutions are embodied in four concepts: the search for meaning, encounter and exchange, poetic life, and citizen action.

The idea of the connection, central to the project, is found in everything we do.

Our deep desire is to re-establish dialogue between individuals and allow them to create spontaneous, sometimes unlikely relationships around proposed activities.



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We believe that it is essential to fight against isolation, to create links and to offer opportunities to learn more about the Other.

This meeting of the Other is, in our opinion, a necessary prerequisite for "living together" and constitutes a source of enrichment through confrontation with differences.

It is also fundamental for us to take into account the context in which La Tricoterie develops in Saint-Gilles in Brussels. The idea is not to create a "bubble" cut off from reality, but to integrate the neighbourhood (by going to its "meeting") and to take into account existing initiatives. In this sense, the place was conceived as a tool for gathering and synergy.

ENCATC: Can you give us some insight into your education background and what has been your path leading you to La Tricoterie?

Joëlle Yana: I did my studies at IHECS in the socio-cultural animation and lifelong education section. It was during a university job that the idea of knitting (tricoter in French) emerged in our heads, but it was then only a project. After my studies I did a training in multimedia.

ENCATC: How do you stay on top of the latest developments in your field and remain innovative?

Joëlle Yana: We try to continuously train and above all to meet a maximum number of people active in the sector of events and culture. We were also coached by several people.

ENCATC: Are there any recent projects at La Tricoterie that you are particularly proud of?

Joëlle Yana: Yes, there is the Couscous "Sepharabe", which we organized on October 31, 2016 (we will reprogram it in January).

Relations between Jewish and Arab communities are often instrumentalized or caricatured. The clichés are legion. The Israeli- Palestinian conflict has imposed itself everywhere, even opposing people who did not want to take part. Yet Sephardic Jews, for example, have recipes and customs that remind one of their neighbors in the Arab world.

In the space of a meal, we tried to see everything that brought Jews closer to Arabs, and more than 200 people came together to share a meal. There was Kosher and Hallal meat, a Jewish and a Muslim cook

We also had a live band, Nagham Zikrayat, was present to entrain throughout the evening!

ENCATC: What skills or personal attributes do you think you have that help you to run your business (outside of your design talent)?

Joëlle Yana: At the skill level, I think I have acquired a good knowledge of project management, event organization, and tasks related to communication, both external and internal. Since I am the coordinator of la Tricoterie, I must try to have a global vision of many things while sometimes keeping some distance to have enough space to reflect.

On the capacity level, I would say enthusiasm, because it takes a lot to rebound under all circumstances. La Tricoterie is an important project

that also involves many people, so we encounter situations that are sometimes complex, but so human.

ENCATC: What had you wished you had known before you started your business?

Joëlle Yana: Maybe I could have more knowledge in the management of the catering business. Because through all our activities, there is always this friendly space to implement and it is really a world that I knew not well and that is very complex.

ENCATC: What are the greatest difficulties you have encountered? How have you overcome them?

Joëlle Yana: There are two types of difficulties, the first is financial. Cultural activities without subsidies are still in deficit. So they always represent a cost for our structure. We try to respond constantly to calls for projects of Wallonia Brussels and COCOF to have this opportunity one day.

The second difficulty is human management because, given the financial difficulties, we ask our teams a lot and are sometimes out of breath with the amount of work and the little means we have.

ENCATC: How did you go about getting start-up funds and how did you use them to get your business up and running?

Joëlle Yana: The start-up funds are only private funds and we also borrowed money from the bank.

ENCATC: What advice would you give to students or early career professionals looking to start their own business or project?

Joëlle Yana: It may be a little thing, but I would say to believe in their dream, not to let go of an idea that is close to their heart. And even if it is sometimes necessary to make professional detours before reaching the heart of the project, one must try to keep this thread and to follow it at all costs. Then to surround myself with people both competent and well-intentioned, because these two qualities are essential to me. They work together, always.

ENCATC: What keeps you motivated and going?

Joëlle Yana: Rethinking the meaning of our project. La Tricoterie is a connection factory. We want people to meet, talk to each other, look at each other. Every event that creates this bond gives us the energy to move forward against everything that may come our way.



About La Tricoterie

La Tricoterie wants to be a "Link Factory": a meeting place where various disciplines and audiences can meet, in a spirit of exchange and emulation.

That is why our cultural programme (concerts, plays, exhibits ...) is combined with a "civic" programme (debates, conferences, intergenerational workshops, philosophy café ...). We also offer our spaces for rent for professional of private events.

When it comes to financing, La Tricoterie adopted an innovative economic model, based on the principle of "communicating vessels", with a combination of profitable and non-profitable events. We alternate private or corporate events with socio- cultural activities, funded both by our own means and occasional public subsidies.

La Tricoterie was founded both as a cooperative (Théodore SCRL) and a non-profit organisation (La Tricoterie asbl). It offers a participatory model for all potential "tricoteurs" who wish to partake in this adventure with us in order to realise a true civic, sustainable investment (not just patronage or sponsoring).



<http://www.tricoterie.be>