



Reviving  
traditional  
crafts to  
create jobs



**MONTENEGRO**  
GENNEVILLIERS



## BRIEF DESCRIPTION

Bijelo Polje is a small town (population 15,000) near Montenegro's north-eastern border, whose textile industry has been in decline, leading to the depopulation of the region. Mismanaged privatisations have resulted in a large number of long-term unemployed middle-aged people.

In 2011 a local school teacher and amateur weaver, Radmila Veličković, responded to a small local call for project proposals, which enabled her to buy five looms and to start training young women to weave. In 2013, she and her trainees registered the Niti association, which designs and produces woollen items such as socks, gloves, scarves, vests, blankets, rugs, souvenirs and decorative items such as children's seats in the shape of a sheep. It also carries out cultural projects such as 'Woollen Road', which animated interest in the woollen industry in the local community.



It makes use of wool which would otherwise go to waste, and sells its wares both to individuals and to domestic and international organisations putting on tourist fairs, foreign embassies etc.

The enterprise has no formal employees, but provides part-time paid work for local women who have difficulty finding jobs and who may be facing traumatic conditions in their lives. They also knit at home.

Niti is currently financed on a project basis, and does not earn enough income to be financially sustainable. It has for example received a small grant (€14,600) from the United States embassy to cover the costs of training unemployed women and disabled people in handicrafts and business skills.

The enterprise has a good relationship with the municipality and the Bijelo Polje Tourist Office.

The municipality has allowed Niti to occupy the premises of an old hospital, which is now being converted into a showroom, handicraft museum and workspace. The municipality invites Niti to traditional festivals, and purchases a small number of items to be used as gifts for visitors. However it does not view Niti as a serious social enterprise which can contribute to the town's employment or economy.



## GOVERNANCE MODEL

As an association, Niti is governed by a board, which appoints a legal representative. Niti's eight permanent members decide what the association should produce, and sell its products, mainly at fairs across Montenegro. Apart from the members, Niti also has a number of co-workers and trainees.



**START DATE:**  
**1964**



**LEGAL FORM:**  
**Worker co-operative**



**N° EMPLOYEES:**  
**3,600**



**Charles, Prince of Wales and Camilla, Duchess of Cornwall visits NITI**



## SOCIAL IMPACT

iti gives its workers the opportunity to socialise, to connect with people who have problem similar to their own, and to reconceptualise their family and social situations. It also gives new knowledge and skills, and enables them to value those skills they already possess.

Niti also brings together different communities – not only weaves and knitters, but also shepherds and school students – and develops tolerance among different national communities.



## STRENGTHS

- Provides flexible part-time work for women
- Trains local unemployed women in handicraft skills and reduces poverty
- Strong commitment of Niti's members to its work and mission
- Trust and consultation among stakeholders
- Preserves craft skills and cultural traditions, breeds tolerance and develops tourism



## WEAKNESSES

- Products do not meet needs of local market – need to research markets and diversify
- Is not (yet) economically self-supporting
- Economic aspect is undervalued in relation to the social impact
- Lack of ecosystem to support strengthening economic performance

**NEVLADINO UDRUŽENJE NITI**  
**Ul. Nedeljka Merdovića bb**  
**Bijelo Polje 84000**  
**Montenegro**

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