

“Romanians love bread, so I thought ‘why not make a difference as we bake it?’”

In Bucharest, one bakery is championing equal opportunities as well as delicious hand-crafted bakes

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IRINA SORESCU (above) came up with the idea of a bakery staffed by women who struggle to find employment



For many, having a career and juggling a young family presents a real challenge – but at one bakery in Bucharest, it's also a prerequisite. “Single mothers or women with more than two kids under their care” is the first criteria of a job description hiring bakers for MamaPan, located in the Vitan area, a 15-minute drive south of the city centre. It's a group that some employers shun, but MamaPan does the exact opposite.

Part of the Romanian capital's Centre Partnership for Equality (CPE), MamaPan was established with a social mission to create jobs for women in vulnerable groups, such as mothers who raise their children alone and those with more than two children

belonging to the Roma minority. “We are an organisation creating opportunities for disadvantaged girls and women in Romania,” says CPE Executive President Irina Sorescu, who founded MamaPan. The project currently employs seven women, offering them good wages, a flexible schedule and a friendly working environment. They also receive training in artisan bread-making.

Sorescu first thought up MamaPan in 2015 during a stint at the ERSTE Foundation NGO Academy in Vienna, a project that works to strengthen the social sector in Central and South-Eastern Europe. A few months later, the first loaf of bread was being sold. Cofounded by the European Social



Fund, the bakery has continued growing with help from partners including supermarket Kaufland Romania, which has run corporate social responsibility campaigns such as “Bread is a gift”.

So why did Sorescu decide on bread for a social business? “I love it,” replies Sorescu, smiling. “So do most Romanians – we eat it every day.” However, struggling to find the traditional bread she desired, she set to work with the help of Corina Munteanu, MamaPan’s Production Manager. Munteanu created the recipe for leavened bread, using only natural sourdough, without preservatives, enhancers or artificial flavours.

Unlike most bakeries, MamaPan only uses an oven and dough mixer. “I was told I was crazy to try to establish a bakery without using industrial yeast and lots of modern equipment,” says Sorescu. But despite the painstaking process, which can take up to 24 hours for one loaf of bread, the aim was to create a healthy product that is nutritious and easily digested.

MamaPan’s “slow bread” motto has already broken barriers. Sorescu says that at food fairs and workshops for local kids, “we have succeeded in educating Romanians on what leavened bread is and its benefits. We’ve even shown them you can enjoy pastries without sugar.”



Bucharest businesses that give back



MEȘTESHUKAR BUTIQ (MBQ)

With a stylish boutique in the centre of Bucharest, MBQ is a social enterprise aimed at reviving traditional Roma crafts, and sells striking copper bowls, woven baskets and colour-rich dresses in contemporary designs. mbq.ro



THERAPY CAFÉ

Housed in an elegant historical villa, Therapy Café employs people from disadvantaged backgrounds, including those with a substance abuse history. With a quirky green design scheme, the café also hosts events on various forms of therapy. cafe-therapy.ro



MERCI CHARITY BOUTIQUE

A charity concept store supporting kids in need, Merci raises funds for low-income children in Romania’s villages through education and medical initiatives. Stop by the whimsical café, Acuarela, where 30 percent of all profits are donated to the Merci cause. mercicharity.ro

CORINA MUNTEANU (below) is MamaPan’s production manager and trains the bakery employees



In fact, MamaPan has done more than that. It has created a community. “At MamaPan, I found real understanding,” says 29-year-old mother of three Andreea Condurache, whose husband works abroad. “If my kids get sick, I know that a colleague will fill in for me. In other bakeries they would simply fire you if you didn’t show up.” Luminița Bușe, a 37-year-old divorced mum of two, agrees. “It used to be hard to find work, but at MamaPan I found acceptance and support.”

Alongside its shelf presence at supermarkets such as Kaufland and Ki-Life, and on menus at popular restaurants Simbio and Puro & Bio, the social bakery thrives on deliveries to both companies and individuals, and has even begun creating customised orders for clientele, including bread without gluten.

“We have a personal relationship with our clients,” Sorescu says. “It’s like calling your very own baker and supporting the community while doing so.” What could taste better than that? mamapan.ro

✈ Wizz Air flies to Bucharest