



#### Company Name

private school, Environmental education center  
for children – Yoga teacher

#### Date of Interview

20/07/2021

#### Contact Person

Theodora Tzalonikou

#### Site

[www.treehealth.4ty.gr](http://www.treehealth.4ty.gr)

instagram: @tzalonikoudora

facebook: Theodora Tzalonikou

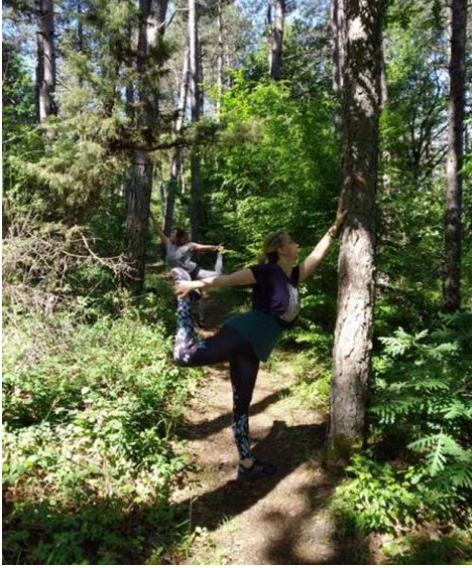


**Location:** the school is located in the city of Grevena. The activities take part in various mountainous places, i.e. all of the mountainous villages of Grevena, Metsovo, Valia Kalda area etc.

Grevena is a mountainous urban center, at 540m, in the Region of West Macedonia. It has almost 13,200 residents and it is located almost 55km far from the town of Metsovo.

Theodora Tzalonikou studied Economics, has an MSc in Environmental Education and she is a yoga teacher. She is also a postgraduate student in the MSc ‘Environment and Development of Mountainous Areas’, of NTUA.





Hi Theodora, you run a business in a mountainous area. Can you describe me your relation with the place? Have you always been living here? Did you leave and returned?

Hi Stella, thank you, I am glad for this too. I was born and lived until I was 11 years old, in the village Poros, in the region of Grevena. Later, we relocated with my family in the city of Grevena so that it would be easier for me to attend school and out of school activities. At the age of 17, I started my studies in Economics, at the University of West Macedonia, in Kozani city. At the same time, I was studying yoga and pilates in a school in Athens. After I finished my studies, I studied at the MSc “Environmental Education” at the Aegean University, in Rodos island. At that time, I was also working at a local gym. After that, I returned in Grevena where I run my own wellbeing center with yoga classes and also an environmental education private school.

Well, all very interesting. Can you please describe me your business, in detail? When you started it, what it is exactly, how many people are involved, etc?

The business is called: “Tree Health” and I give lessons of Yoga, Yogalates and Therapeutic Yoga. The lessons are addressed at people of all ages. In addition, I give lessons that combine children’s yoga and environmental education to children. All groups are from 3 to 7 persons. The lessons take place inside the building facilities of my center and, also, outdoors in nature when the weather allows it. This enables my trainees to come in contact with the natural environment which is very beneficial in relaxing, revitalizing and healing them.

I started my business in 2011. At the moment, I run my business alone. However, many times I invite friends/collaborates of a variety of skills, i.e. wellbeing teachers, psychologists, nutritionists, reflexologists, etc., to organize some one or two –day seminars, workshops, etc.

What inspired you in this? What triggered you to start up this business?

I was involved in body kinesiology (movement) and healing, since childhood, as self-taught. I remember myself at the age of 10 trying to find ways to relief and activate my body. All this, of course, had positive result in my psychology as well. Later, I found out about yoga and pilates and their connection with kinesiology and healing. Also, I grew up in nature. I was living in a village and our house was outside the main part of the village because my parents owned a cheese-making business (which isn’t allowed to be built inside a village). The cheese-making facilities were sheltered at the ground floor of our house. Also, with all my family, in weekends we visited my grandfather’s town, Metsovo. So, I always wanted to do something regarding the healing of the body and the soul...and being close to nature, in this way, which I love very much. My studies also were very close to all these. In the end, I used all my knowledge so far (university studies and self-taught knowledge) and I applied it to my business.

I understand that you are, mainly, self-taught in your yoga teaching experience. What kind of special training did you get on this? Any special seminars?



Yes, I was self-taught mainly but then I also studied these objectives. And, I started my business all alone, based on my experience and all the money I had managed to save back then. I collaborate with other similar schools in Greece and from abroad, also, and all invited trainers are hosted in my space; some of these seminars are free for my students and others are not. In addition, some years we organize summer retreats in mountains, during spring or autumn, in Metsovo and in Vovoussa (a village in east Zagori).

Would you like to attend any kind of seminar regarding your business? If something would be organized in MIRC, what would interest you?



Yes, it would be interesting for me to attend a seminar regarding mountainous regions and, mainly, which areas could be suitable in order to organize a retreat, i.e. areas that combine suitable accommodation facilities along with natural environment.

I understand that you like very much what you do. Now, please tell me about the difficulties you faced when you first started with your business. Economic, social or whatever other difficulties you had.



Well, when I started, 10 years ago, Greece had entered the economic crisis. I didn't have the necessary money either to buy or rent a large space, the way I had imagined it to be. So, I decided to rent a small space that I could afford and that could cover some basic needs in my first entrepreneurial steps. This space is located at the center of Grevena city, is rather small and I am still there, after all these years. I would like to go to a larger space, but still I can't afford it. So, this was (and is) my most important problem. I didn't have any other, except the fact that many people have a completely wrong idea on what yoga is and how do I teach it. So, I would say that there is ongoing misunderstanding on this and many are still afraid to start a yoga class. It is also common, that many people confuse yoga with religion and think of it as something that is opposed to our religion. So, I try to inform anyone that in my school, yoga teaching is aiming at the training of the body and its healing, as well as its relaxation and revitalization. Nothing else.

Yes, people can be very suspicious in anything, especially in small societies. How did you overcome all this?



To tell you the truth, there were times I even questioned myself whether I do something wrong or against religious beliefs and maybe I was insulting, at these terms, some people...there were even times I even thought of closing my school. I am close to religion and I wouldn't want to do anything insulting. However, I thought a lot about it and I discussed it with my spiritual father and I explained what and how I teach. So, everything turned out well at the end.

Did you have any special difficulties, in your business activities, just because you are a woman?



No, I didn't have any difficulty because of my gender.



### Did you receive any kind of help to start your business?

Yes, my family helped me a lot in everything. Especially, in setting up the space. And I really thank them!



### Did you receive any kind of help from the local (or other) Municipality?

Yes, they helped me in organizing some free environmental activities, which gave me the opportunity to come in contact and meet people, who later came to attend classes. Also, some years ago, the Municipality of Metsovo had given me (for free) a space for six months where I was able to have some of my classes.



### What are the most positive results from your business activities, in your living in general?

I would say my direct contact with other people, becoming familiar with their thoughts/problems and be part of their healing. In addition, my contact with the natural environment.



### Now, let's move to economic issues. What kind of monetary capital you needed in order to start? Did you get any funding? Did you invest personal work on your business?

I used a very small initial monetary capital, of 3,000€. All of this was my personal savings. I didn't receive any kind of funding. I personally worked a lot to start the business. Also, I had help from my two brothers, my parents and a friend of mine. They all worked with me for one month in order to set up the space I rent and be able to start the classes. My income from this business could cover all of my business expenses, i.e, rent and utilities (electricity, phone, internet, heating, insurance) and my living ones. However, I can't have more than 200€ annual savings. Of course, this is determined by the way of living, as well. May be if I am spending less I would be able to save more.



### Would you make use of a funding if you could?

Yes, if it was a funding that I wouldn't have to return any money I would use it.



### You are already running your enterprise for ten years. Do you consider it successful?

Yes, it is successful. However, it could be even more.



### Does your income derives only from your business?

Yes, I don't have any other source of income.



### Has covid affected your business in any way?

Yes, the pandemic affected me a lot. I had to keep it closed, as many similar businesses, and it was really difficult for me to cover all running expenses. The business is open now, but still many people are not yet so willing to come, as they are still afraid of covid.



### How is your business promoted? Do you use any media?

Yes, I have the business's webpage, a facebook page and Instagram. However, I think I should promote it even better and more.



### Would some kind of seminar on marketing/promotion help you?

Yes, it would be really helpful, I believe. I would like someone to teach me a variety of quality advertising methods and promotion methods/techniques.



### Your future plans?

I would like to have my own space, larger than the current one. I would also like it to be located in a place close to but outside the city, with its own private garden (for outdoor activities).

You are working and living in a mountainous area. Would you like to describe me how is it, working and living in mountains? How are your relations with local people?



Well, working conditions are rather hard in winter because of the cold and the snowfall, which is frequent here. This, in turn, results in many people staying inside their houses because of cold weather and of being afraid of viruses, in spite of the fact that they are willing to get out and be more active. In regard to local people, I always had and still have very good relations.



### Do you think you affect local people through your business activities?

Yes, I believe that at a large level local residents are affected. They have changed their sitting indoors way of living by replacing it with a more active way through activities that contribute to their wellbeing, long-living and good health. Anyone who tries our yoga and other classes/activities remains.



### Do you think you inspire other young people, in any way?

Yes, I believe I do. When I opened this school there was no similar school here. Later, many came to ask me on a variety of things, regarding this business, and I helped them as much as I could. In the next years, some more similar schools/centers opened in the area. Some closed, some are still open. And, each one has its own attendees.



What would you advise someone who would ask you on starting a business like this?

I would advise anyone to love what they are doing, follow their will and be themselves.

Would you consider employ some local residents in your business?

I am on my own at the moment, but in the future may be yes, why not?

Do you have any kind of regrets about your decision to start this business? Do you consider leaving it for something else, in the future?

No, I have no regrets about it. The only reason that sometimes makes me think of quitting it, is that it demands my everyday occupation with it. I have to be in my classes morning and afternoon, every day. In addition, everyone who comes wants to have a training with me, which makes it difficult for me to collaborate with another teacher, at the moment. However, I have reached a point that I am able to organize my programme in such a way that I have some time for myself and for personal relaxation.

*Theodora thank you very much for this interview ! It was really nice talking to you !*