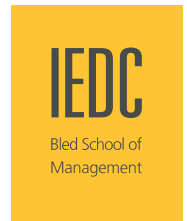


# IEDC alumni Success Story



*A School with a View*

Date: 10. 5. 2017

Saviola Shahollari, CEO and Founder BAITS, Albania

## »I BELIEVE THAT INNOVATION CAN SPUR FROM PERIPHERY«

“I feel like “a whale in an aquarium” - I have the capabilities and knowledge to lead bigger companies than the ones I have had the chance so far, “answered Saviola Shahollari, when she was approached by The Mangers’ Association of Slovenia. Namely, their Young Managers Section launched a Scholarship Fund which every year chooses some of the most prominent IEDC Alumni and grants them scholarships. Saviola’s answer about her career goals clearly shows her courage and ambitions to “look for the ocean where I can swim like a whale – lead a company with a greater impact than just local.” Not surprisingly, she won the scholarship. Just a month later, in 2016, she also successfully finished the Executive MBA at IEDC-Bled School of Management.



Saviola is the founder and CEO of BAITS, where she has been working in the field of digital marketing & consulting since 2012. Prior to that, she was the general manager at Kristal Communication for 5 years, and marketing and HR manager ADA Holding (Ada Group). She started her career as a marketing manager at VEVE Group. Her career path is always progressing, but still she is aware of the importance of life-work balance. She stresses: “Enjoy today, don’t live it with tomorrow in mind.”

By Tonja Blatnik, Head of Corporate Communications, IEDC

**One of your advantages is being multilingual. You speak 6 languages and have a rich experience in translating and even consecutive interpretation. How do these skills help you be a better leader?**

Growing up with my grandparents, I learned how to read 2 years before starting 1st grade, as my grandfather needed me to read the newspaper to him. This gave me a “head start” so I did not have to study hard at home, therefore the extracurricular activity for me became learning Italian at the age of 9. After starting to learn English, I was asked to interpret in an event when I was only 12 and I got paid for the first time in my life – so I got the first taste of independence by becoming “self-employed” at a very young age. Consecutive interpretation has taught me tolerance, accepting people with different origins and has kept my spark for new knowledge burning.

**In 2012 you founded your own company BAITs. Why did you decide to establish your own business? How does it feel to be on your own, instead of being part of a corporation?**

After working for about 8 years with the same boss and in the same industry, the challenges stopped coming. It all felt too easy and routine and I reported only to the owner. Even if it sounds cliché, it was the truth: I was not challenged anymore and I was already over-qualified for the market to start searching for a job, so I decided to try entrepreneurship. The only greatest difference between your own business and someone else’s company is SLEEP – you lose it when it’s your company and someone else loses it when it’s not yours. Now, after 5 years, I can see that on your own, the challenge is

greater because you don’t have to compromise, you can be persistent and stubborn or even wrong as much as you want.

**Scholarship Fund of Young Managers Section of The Managers’ Association of Slovenia (MAS), the preeminent managers’ association in Slovenia, chose you as the winner of the 2016/17 scholarship. In the questionnaire for MAS scholarship, you stated that your main advantage compared to other MBA students is “being polyvalent”. Please, explain.**

At IEDC many of the students come from the corporate world and I was amazed at their experience being in the same company or jobs for 10 or sometimes even 25 years. At times I even envied them and the sense of peace that such security can provide. In Albania laws, governments and systems change rapidly and you have to adapt fast otherwise you don’t make it. Being polyvalent for me means being ready to work as a translator or own a business, within the same lifetime. The advantage stands in the fact that if I were applying for a job I could select more areas of search (having worked in human resources, marketing, sales, operations and finance) than a colleague who for example has spent all her professional life in marketing.

**You also participated in the IEDC Case Study Competition and won the 1st prize among more than 400 competitors! Congratulations! Why is lifelong learning important to you and for leaders as such?**

When I participated in the competition, I just wanted to test myself beyond the borders of my own country, as we have a saying: “You might be the first in a

village but the last in a city” so I participated to see where was I in the city. I had always wanted to do an MBA for the knowledge and for the classmates. I always want to know more, gain a broader perspective of things and listen to people’s experiences and stories- wherever they come from. I believe that a leader will have followers if they do not disconnect from people – and at IEDC that was sealed when I learned that it means possessing emotional intelligence and having a high Vitality Quotient.

**Do you think that leaders originally coming from smaller countries like Albania have a tougher task achieving a global carrier and a global mindset and what is their (yours as well) main advantage compared to those coming from big countries? Can innovation spur from periphery?**

Albania (or Slovenia) has less than 3 million inhabitants in total, imagine the market size that we have in front of us, compared to the US or China or India? The good news is that I have noticed, at least in Albania, that the young generations skipped some steps of development. After 50 years under communism, we did not try



to catch up, but make leaps instead aiming to grasp the key skills that we need globally, especially in IT, languages or customer services. The reason WHY I believe that innovation can spur from periphery is that even though we might not have the most modern factories or best R&D laboratories we will keep the "outside of the box thinking" that spurs innovation.

### **What is your favourite memory of IEDC?**

Now after the dust has settled I actually miss all of it, even the EOM maybe. I think I miss the people of the school and of the class. There is a memory which always makes me smile when I remember playing table football with a group from the class at 4.30 in the morning as if we did not have to go to class the next

day. I felt like I had gone back to childhood again thus I could start over and reinvent myself again.

### **What advice would you give to your younger self? Why?**

Enjoy today, don't live it with tomorrow in mind. Because now, I see that sometimes I have not fully enjoyed the present only because I was always thinking and focusing on tomorrow.

## **MEET SAVIOLA PERSONALLY**

### **The word in my native language that cannot be translated is ...**

... FLETĚ-RRUFE literally translated PAPER-THUNDER. It comes originally from the communist times. When an employee of a factory was caught doing something bad, there was a paper written for him and published for everyone in the company to read on the company's announcement board, until he came in front of everyone and made an auto critic, promising to not repeat it again. And of course a whole culinary vocabulary of foods :-).

### **The biggest challenge in the future of work is ...**

... keeping humanity and all the sense of logic, emotions and feelings.

### **I am inspired by ...**

... Peter Drucker as in him I see the passion for writing, consulting and business mingled all in one, feeling that it is what I want to become when I grow up :)

### **My favourite IEDC Professor is ...**

... Jim Ellert because thanks to him I was able to win my long suffered challenge with finance, now feeling complete.

### **My vision for future could be defined in the following word ...**

... footprint. Living to leave my set of footprints, in any trail I set. It comes from Ralf Waldo Emerson's saying: "Do not follow where the path may lead, go instead where there is no path and leave a trail."

### **When I think of leadership, I think of ...**

... learning how to be a follower. IEDC taught me that there is a leader and a follower inside me; knowing when to be one or the other is the secret to being an exceptional leader.