



## **PART A. PROFILE OF BUSINESS**

Cotto Meli is a company specialised in the ceramic production located in Collesano, one of the countries of the Sicilian hinterland with the most ancient tradition in ceramics processing. Collesano is also an important town for the production of majolica that in 1600 embellished the most famous Sicilian noble palaces.

Cotto Meli was born (*number years*) years ago, in (*year of foundation*), from an idea of (*Name and Surname*), that during the restoration of his house, not having ceramist relatives, he went to Catania to buy cotto and majolica.

The seller, who was a profound connoisseur of the history and tradition of Sicilian ceramics, was indignant that a collesanese had gone to the eastern part of Sicily to buy these products and had not found any seller of them in his area. Then, he refused to sell both cotto and majolica, with a sentence that struck a lot (*name*): "I do not sell you neither cotto nor majolica."

It was at that moment of shame, that (*name*) matured the idea of recovering this ancient tradition of his country. Starting from scratch, with the help of an architect friend of him, (*name*) began to gather as much information as possible on the ceramics processing, going personally to the elders of the country who had some expertise in this field. The aim was to find the perfect formula for production, and after two years of sacrifices and wastes, the formula was found.

(*Name*) got what he wanted respecting scrupulously what was the ancient production technique, distinguishing itself from industrial production companies (a strength of Cotto Meli). A handmade majolica, with the maniacal desire to respect the tradition that had made the majolica of Collesano so famous throughout Sicily, through the research for ancient decorations in books, palaces and ancient churches.

The production inside the laboratory is an experience that enriches and excites every day more. This has led Cotto Meli to economically satisfactory results, which give it the opportunity to live with dignity especially in this period of crisis the country is facing. As (*name*) states: "These results give us the joy to come every day in the laboratory, opening the oven and discovering the rebirth of the old majolica that would have disappeared if we had not thought about resuming this ancient tradition".

Cotto Meli is a company that operates mainly in the secondary and tertiary sectors, since on the one hand, it deals with the artisanal production of ceramic, and on the other hand, it offers the possibility for customers to stay in its structure and learn how to make ceramics.

Product realised by Cotto Meli are of three types: cotto, majolica and raw-majolica.



For the realisation of **cotto**, the clay is taken from the quarry of Bovitello, as the ancient "stazzunari" of Collesano did. The particularity of this clay makes the bricks in cotto unique that are processed by hand: from the clay mixture, to cooking at about 1000 degrees, to conclude with a natural cooling.

The **majolica** are made on a handmade cotto base, adorned with the typical Sicilian decorations and in particular the one from the collesanese area.

The **raw-majolica** is the result of a process designed and developed by Cotto Meli, unique in its kind. The relief enamel effect is enhanced by the handmade cotto base. Each single piece is unique thanks to the characteristics of the craftsmanship.

The services offered by Cotto Meli are the following:

- Majolica restoration;
- Design consultancy;
- Interior and exterior treatment of cotto floors;
- Special parts glazing.

Cotto Meli customers are private individuals who restore ancient noble palaces and the authority that restores churches.

The production of cotto and majolica is located inside a private house especially when they are country houses, made of stone as Sicilian tradition. Many of these houses have been damaged by the use of industrial materials, but today they are able to find materials that are pertinent to the architecture of our territory.



Cotto Meli operate also in the primary sector, even in a less marked way, through oil production obtained from the olive grove close to the structure.

## **PART B. THE FAMILY DIMENSION OF BUSINESS**

Cotto Meli was founded by (*Name Surname*) near the Parco delle Madonie, precisely in Collesano (Italy), a few steps from the ancient medieval town of Cefalù and only 70 km from Palermo.

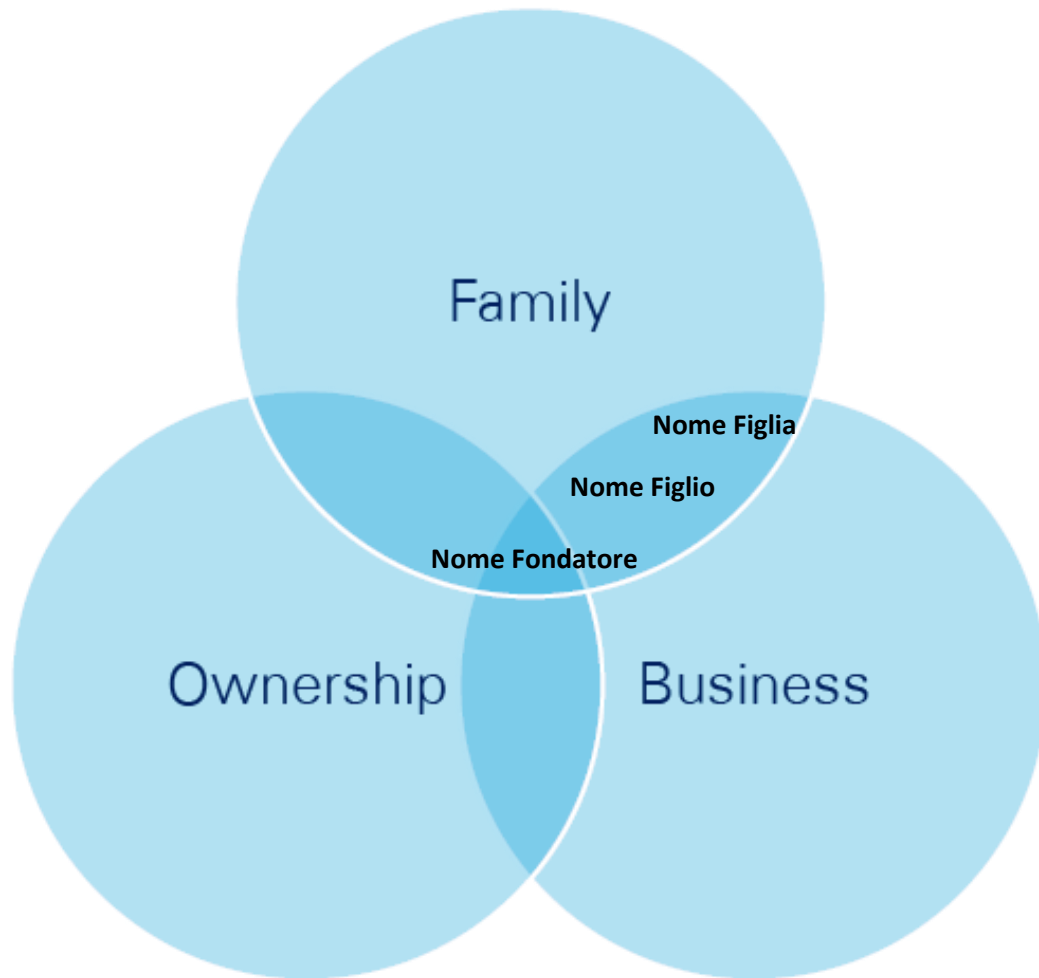
Currently, the company is managed by (*Name Surname*), but they have been working for a few years also the two sons (*Daughter's name*) and (*son's name*), respectively as an artist in the laboratory and as a manager.

It was (*daughter's name*) that about 5 years ago, following a sharp decline in the majolica production, had the idea of combining the ceramic business with rural tourism. This was done by taking advantage of a tour operator's availability that brought its tourists (mainly Germans), from the near village of Cefalù to see the processing of majolica in the Cotto Meli laboratory.

The handmade processing is a silent one and it provides tourists who stay at the structure, an experience of absolute relaxation combined with an educational and artistic one, given the presence of the ceramic workshop. Therefore, what could be a handicap, that is having a laboratory close to the holiday house, became an attraction factor.

Instead, (*Son's name*) plays all those roles that others cannot do, regarding both father's management of customers and sister who is the artist. In other words, (*Son's name*) takes care of running the business on his shoulders while others take care of their own tasks. His figure is very important as it acts as a glue between his father and his sister, who have very strong personalities and are usually in contrast.

The diatribes always concern what should be done and what should not be done, ideas about changes in production, etc.; but if things continue going well, first it is thanks to the compromise within the two generations. Then, according to (*Son's name*), another thing that helps is trying to understand each other, listening to ideas and looking for a meeting point. It does not need to prevaricate on the other, especially within a family business; otherwise, you could create family feuds and problems that could last over time.



**Figure 1 – Cotto Meli 3-Circle diagram**

The inclusion of the children in the company was a bitter and sweet note at the same time for *(Founder's name)*. Children, who were enrolled at the university in those years, told him that they would abandon their studies to dedicate themselves to the family business. For *(Founder's name)* and his wife was a great pain, but today for them it is a matter of pride the fact that their children have interpreted in this way the Cotto Meli mission, giving him enormous satisfaction. Thanks to them, a production process is taking place, which is what makes the company even more competitive in this moment of crisis. Thanks to their contribution, the company has had enormous benefits.

## **PART C. CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES OF BUSINESS GROWTH & SUCCESSION**

Cotto Meli is a company specialised in the production of ceramics that differs from the others for its handmade processing of cotto, majolica and raw-majolica. Of course, there are other similar companies, but they only make objects for the house.

One of the main challenges faced by Cotto Meli was the realisation of the holiday house close to the ceramic workshop. The idea came from (*daughter's name*), who seeing the structure next to the laboratory unused, asked her father to build a holiday house for foreign tourists, giving them the opportunity to follow decoration courses in the laboratory. The father was sceptical about the feasibility of such a project, especially because Collesano is little known by tourists.



However, the daughter convinced him, since Collesano is in a central and easily accessible area: it is located 3 km from Campofelice di Roccella and from the sea; 10 km from the mountain, 11 km from the motorway junction and 20 km from Piano Zucchi (one of the most popular places in the Parco delle Madonie thanks to the Piano Battaglia ski resort).

The major part of the structure was built in absolute economy, i.e. with reused materials and with the children's work. Initially, there was not much to offer, but slowly the few revenues that were recorded, were reinvested to buy new equipment for the holiday house. Work was not perfect since it had not been done by professionals, but this seemed to be appreciated by tourists. For example, the pool has been built in a natural way, perfectly combined with the environment and therefore without the use of cement that affects the rural area.

Immediately after finishing the work, first customers arrived. Bookings have doubled compared to the previous year for the entire period in which the house is rented, i.e. from March to October. It does not exclude that there will not be even in the Christmas period as tourism has evolved, and now tourists do not book months in advance but only few weeks before.

They are last minute and low cost travellers, since it is a house in the countryside and not a luxury hotel in Cefalù.

#### **PART D. THE ENTREPRENEURIAL DIMENSION**

Another challenge, but also a great entrepreneurial move that Cotto Meli wanted to launch, were the decoration courses at the ceramic workshop. When tourists arrive, they have everything available. When they want, the ceramic workshop is just steps away and ready to



organize a decoration course. In this way, Cotto Meli has made the laboratory a strength, despite its proximity to the holiday house could arise perplexity to those people who booked.

Usually, the decoration course is organized in the last days of tourists' stay and it is addressed to adults and children, who get dirty hands and spend a whole day together.

If the stay is long enough, majolica made by tourists is cooked and donated (the process has a duration of 3 days of which one for cooking at 1000 degrees and two for cooling in a natural way). The gift of majolica is very appreciated, because it is the memory of a day spent together in one of the most beautiful and characteristic Sicilian country.

Thanks to the new generation inclined to the use of the most modern digital booking platforms for holiday houses, the business has undergone a real rebirth.

To date, Cotto Meli receives orders from abroad both for ceramics and for oil. In fact, near the complex there is an olive grove that is exploited for the production of oil - "the oil of the house of ceramic" - that is given to those staying in the holiday house, together with majolica.

The Sicilian oil quality is renowned all over the world and this business move indirectly allows Cotto Meli to stay in touch with tourists who have stayed at the holiday house, making them feel always welcome.

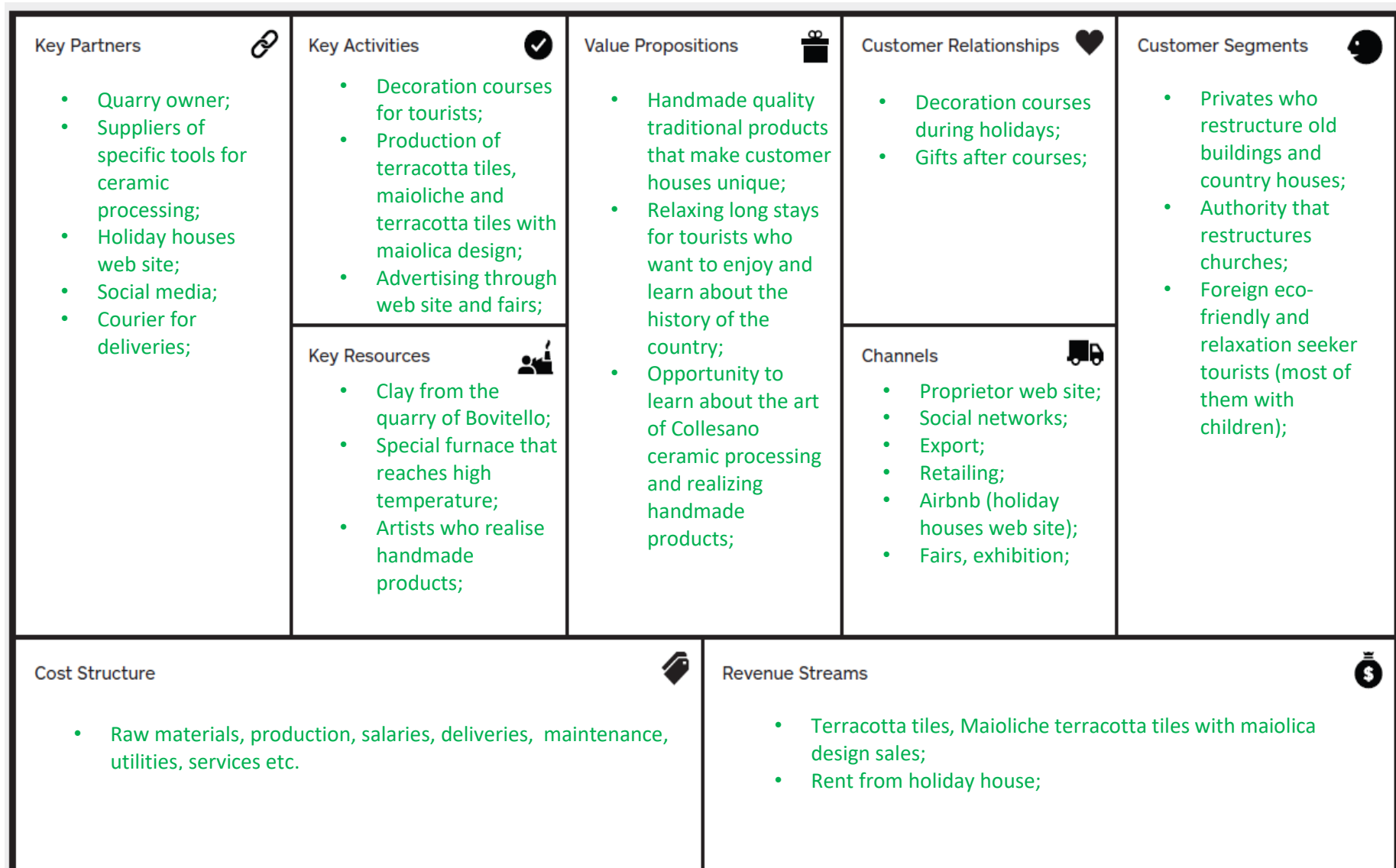


Figure 2 – Cotto Meli business model canvas

## **PART E. FAMILY ENTREPRENEURIALISM: LESSONS & CONCLUSION**

Cotto Meli is a small family business that has been able to accurately centre its mission, which is recovering the handmade production of bricks in cotto and Sicilian majolica.

It is worth noting that Cotto Meli is in its generational transition, given that both children have abandoned their studies and for years have been actively working in the company with the founder. Therefore, we must give credit to *(founder's name)* who has been able to transmit the company mission to its heirs and to trigger in them a strong spirit of attachment to their land traditions.

In particular, Cotto Meli teaches that it is never too late to recover the ancient traditions of a country, especially those of Collesano and Madonie. However, tradition only is not enough; this must be combined with a healthy management from an economic point of view, artistic skills and winning entrepreneurial ideas such as the one implemented by Cotto Meli in the realisation of a holiday house close to the ceramic workshop. This initiative gives the opportunity to tourists who come to stay in the Sicilian hinterland to know ancient traditions of the Sicilian territory; in this case the art of working and decorating ceramics.

Experience and passion have led to faithfully reproduce the products decorations and the ancient techniques of manual processing, all in compliance with the artistic tradition that has given to the collesanese territory a unique cultural and landscape heritage.

To conclude, there are many other lessons that craft businesses can take from the analysed example of Cotto Meli:

- Combining the typical activity of an artisan company with a thematic tourism experience;
- Re-evoking and exploiting the ancient tradition of a territory and the ancient art of hand-working;
- Transferring this tradition to next generations;
- Taking advantage of the ancient knowledge of the community knowing how to wisely apply, combining tradition and entrepreneurial innovation.