

# **Social enterprise founder wins a trip to Tartan Week**

**The Scottish Business Network (SBN) ran a challenge earlier this year and the prize was a trip to New York during Tartan Week. And Zakia Moulaoui Guery, the founder of Invisible Cities, won the prize. So now she is off to America this week – complete with her tartan painted nails.**

As a French teacher at George Heriot's some years ago Zakia knew that this was not going to be a long career, but her work in founding a social enterprise has lasted and is now a sustainable business.



Zakia leading an Invisible Cities tour in 2021

## Invisible Cities

Invisible Cities is an organisation which trains homeless people to become tour guides. This allows them to earn a living, and in many cases to use the organisation as a stepping stone towards a different life.

Zakia explained: “We are a social enterprise, or a not for profit. As well as Edinburgh we also run tours in York, Glasgow, Manchester and now Cardiff. A lot of people suggested running tours and expanding into other cities, but we need to find the right partners to do that. I worked on the expansion to Manchester and Glasgow directly. My team now runs these and they are directly employed by Invisible Cities. But it wasn’t sustainable to do it like this, because the guides – they still need a lot of support day to day. Now what we do is run what you could call a kind of social franchise model where we partner up with a local organisation, and pass on a well of

knowledge of how to do it and how to train people, recruit people, develop tours, and then sell the tours.”

## **US trip**

So this is the way Invisible Cities is expanding to other cities in the UK. But Zakia who is French, was always open to opening up in other cities internationally, perhaps altering the model a little each time – and maybe on a franchisee/franchisor model or on some different basis.

Zakia said: “The idea going to the US is to explore what invisible New York Cities would look like.

“I’ve been pretty straightforward and said there’s a lot of obviously tourism potential in New York and sadly, homelessness in New York. There has been a lot of interest already which is amazing.

“For us it is always two sided – there are people in the tourism industry and then the social side – being able to bring something different to people that may be having a hard time at the moment.

“And also I am looking at investors, enablers and supporters. I am super open to that. Our international expansion may be Paris before New York, but there are many people in New York who work in international tourism. And hopefully I get to meet some of the big businesses as well.”



Zakia really does have tartan nails...

## **Scottish Business Network**

SBN say that over the last seven years the group has built up a community of people, investors, advisers and senior executives all over the world, but their strongest market is in the US.

The programme has included some preparation conducted while still in Scotland and the group will travel to New York this week, led by SBN CEO Russell Dalgleish and other key members of the SBN team, both here and in the USA.

The preparation has involved online training in sales and marketing, as well as some lessons about US culture and doing business there. When the group reaches America there will be some PR and promotion opportunities as well as group sessions with American contacts. SBN promise each participant a minimum of four connections who they will meet up with. The group will be all over social media and will take part in the New York City Tartan Day Parade on Saturday.

Dalgleish said: “We are thrilled about this Tartan Week trip, as our presence not only highlights the excellence of Scottish whisky and scale-ups, but also demonstrates the strong ties between Scotland and the United States. We are also eager to showcase the quality, innovation and talent emerging from Scotland.”



Invisible Cities ran a challenge in 2022 called In Our Shoes. The idea was to wear a pair of shoes for 24 hours – just like a homeless person would have to do.