Giannis, 73, Fabric Shop, Nicosia

**1. Can you tell me a few things about yourself? For example, when and where you were born? Did you study for anything? Have you travelled or lived overseas?**

*I’m 73 years old and I’ve got two children and five grandchildren. I was born and brought up in Nicosia and I’ve been working here from a young age. I work six days a week, nine hours a day.*

**2. Have you ever owned another business in the past? How long have you been an owner of a business? How many businesses have you owned in the past?**

*No, I’ve never had another business. I’ve been here since 1967, that’s 52 years, so you can understand that it’s the only business I ever started and I’m still here.*

**3. Can you tell me about the history behind your business?**

*My father started this business in 1967, when I was 22 years old. He had worked in quite a few other jobs in the past before opening this shop. He worked in construction, then in the public works department, but he always said that one day he would start his own shop selling fabrics. My mother didn’t really believe him, but I remember the day when he came home and told her that he was fed up with his job and that he was going to open up a shop. So, in 1967 he found this shop here and started his business. I worked with him at the shop because he needed help and so I learnt everything about the job quickly; then I was able to take over the business once my father wasn’t able to work anymore. Now my son comes in to help me for a few hours, as he works as a delivery person for a car parts company and he doesn’t have much free time.*

**4. Can you tell me what the advantages were for you in starting the business?**

*I took over the business from my father and I’ve been running it ever since. It’s been 52 years since I started working here. In the last 10 years the street here has come to life and has changed a lot. Quite a few tourists come here and I don’t know if you have walked around the area but it’s full of cafes, small restaurants and the like. The checkpoint is here too and a lot of people walk through to the occupied side and so there are a lot of people around. But it’s not like it was before [he shakes his head, longing for the time in the past when the street was more like a shopping centre]. It was full of shops like ours before, there were no cafes and restaurants here. People would come here to shop, not come for a walk, or go for a drink. The shops are gone and regardless of whether they say it’s for the better that we have tourists coming to the area, I don’t agree at all. Do you know how many people, who had small shops here like me, have closed down their businesses to give way to bigger and newer shops? Too many.*

**5. Are you facing any obstacles or problems in keeping your business going?**

*It’s what I had just told you about. People have changed and our business is going from bad to worse. I don’t have any customers here and I’ve had all these fabrics that you see here for ages. Sometimes tourists come in but what do I have for them to buy? The Cypriots? They don’t want anything. The time will definitely come when I’ll have to close the shop because I’m not making anything and unfortunately the rent is due on the 1st day of every month.*

**6. Why don’t you retire since the business isn’t making any profit?**

*The reason I’m still here is because I like to be here, I’ve nothing else to do; my wife passed away six years ago, so I come here to be with the other shop-owners that I’ve been friends with for so many years. Apart from that, I’ve been coming here for 52 years and it’s something that my father started. It feels strange to talk about closing down. But then again, even if I do close the shop, I’ll still come here to visit my friends every day and I’ll get upset when I see the shop closed down.*

**7. Considering the experience that you have built up over the years but also the experience that you are going through now, would you say that you are still able to maintain the business and deal with the problems that affect it?**

*If things hadn’t changed 10 years ago the area and the situation here would have been very different. The government supports the opening of big stores which bring revenue into the country but this is happening at the expense of the smaller businesses. Anyway, I won’t go into it otherwise we’ll be here all day [he cuts the conversation short, obviously annoyed]. I’ll stay here for as long as I can take it, financially, physically and emotionally.*