

CASE STUDY TITLE: TOGETHER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT SOCIAL COOPERATIVE

AUTHOR: SNRSS

THEME: CIRCULAR ECONOMY

The Together for the Environment Social Cooperative was established in 2019 by two legal entities - the Powidz Commune and the Ostrowite Commune from Wielkopolska region. The purpose of establishing the cooperative was to create an entity that will carry out tasks in the field of municipal waste management and, at the same time, to enable the professional and social activation of the residents of both municipalities. Currently the cooperative employs 17 people.

The cooperative is an interesting example of the involvement of many stakeholders to achieve common goals. The most important of these are:

- to provide residents of municipalities a high-quality waste collection service;
- to take control of the process of implementing this service by local governments;
- to activate people at risk of social exclusion (in this case, they are unemployed people with alcohol problems) living in the two municipalities;
- to raise awareness of the local community in the field of environmental protection
- to close the loop in waste management - including, above all, waste segregation and water conservation.

It is worth to elaborate some of these goals. The establishment of the social cooperative allowed the municipality to take control over the process of providing the municipal waste collection service. The local governments obtained additional tools to streamline the process. This includes the ability to use reserved contracts in public procurement procedure. On the other hand, ongoing cooperation with the cooperative allows local governments to improve activities aimed at making the most efficient use of collected waste. These are the activities carried out parallelly in two directions:

- development and modernization of the cooperative's infrastructure and equipment. It will allow to disposal waste in a more efficient way. The cooperative plans to build its own waste transformation base (including e.g. a biocomposting plant), which in the long term will both protect the environment and reduce the price of services;
- enhancing green skills among employees and local community. These activities are tailored to the needs of the target groups. Employees of the cooperatives - are trained to

gain practical competences: e.g. harmful waste disposal or energy conservation, managers are learned on how to find innovative green technologies or sources of financing; and finally, residents of both counties – are offered educational activities e.g. waste segregation.

It is worth noting that these are local, bottom-up activities, what can affect positively into their effectiveness and sustainability. A social cooperative can be a particularly good partner in this field. Unlike a traditional company, in its activities it must take into account social factors - such as inward-looking reintegration activities for the benefit of its employees and outward-looking activities for the benefit of local communities. It is also easier for a social cooperative to obtain special development funds (e.g. grants, subsidies) intended for achieving educational and social goals.

Challenges

The most important challenge that the Cooperative has to face is related to the searching for sources of financing the further development. The Cooperative CEO notes that while many solutions are interesting on the conceptual level, it is much more difficult to find specific offers when it comes to hard assets investment such as equipment and infrastructure. The situation is not eased because of the price pressure from the main principals - local governments, which, for obvious reasons, are keen to maintain the most favourable price possible. Finally, the third challenge is to build the network of partners, stakeholders and entities that would jointly take steps to gradually close the loop and reduce the amount of non-disposable waste. These are plans that the cooperative intends to implement in the coming years.

Environmental and/or social effects:

- delivering of high-quality municipal services to the community;
- green skills education addressed to cooperative employees and community residents;
- social and professional activation of cooperative employees

Questions arising from the case / problem:

- What is the problematic situation the SE is trying to solve? (problem)
- Why did they decide to solve it? What drives them? (purpose)
- What are the SE's activities? What do they do to solve it/them? What other steps would

you take to solve the problem? (solution)

- What is their target group? Who are their clients? Who are their customers? (customer segments)
- How will the SE's activities change the world or the situation for the better? (impact)
- And how will they know that they achieved that? (key metrics)
- So what does de SE do differently? What do their customers perceive as the biggest value? (unique value proposition)
- In which ways do they deliver their products or services (channels)
- What are their main costs and what is the main source of their revenue? (revenue)

Stakeholders:

- local government units
- private companies
- individual customers

Positive ethical issues in relation to the scenario:

- vocational activation of people at risk of exclusion
- high-quality social services provided by local government
- bottom-up activities aimed at environmental protection

Green skills addressed

PROCUREMENT SKILLS, WASTE MANAGEMENT SKILLS, FINANCIAL SKILLS, ENERGY SKILLS

SDGS addressed goals:

- 8. Decent work and economic growth
- 10. Reduced inequalities
- 12. Responsible consumption and production