

2023 POSITIVE IMPACT STARTUPS

ECOSYSTEM
OF CHANGE

REPORT



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2023 POSITIVE IMPACT STARTUPS

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OF CHANGE



Publisher:



KOZMINSKI

BUSINESS HUB

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Positive Impact Innovations

Bolesław Rok

Kozminski University

Will entrepreneurship develop towards utilizing innovations for sustainable development, climate, and the environment - positive impact innovations? Will these positive impact startups (SPWs) create a real alternative to the current business practices based on excessive resource exploitation, overconsumption of products, and the morally void pursuit of excessive profits?

SPWs represent economic activities through which individuals, driven by a passion for the common good, elevate the level of reliability and efficiency through innovative technologies, leading to rapid growth in the company/organization's value, the quality of people's lives, and the environment within their sphere of influence. The founders of SPWs contribute to addressing the most significant challenges formulated as Sustainable Development Goals by implementing innovative products and services.

Innovation is the most crucial element in startup development, alongside impact and the potential for solution implementation. However, this pertains to a specific type of innovation commonly referred to as positive impact innovations or responsible innovations, which contribute to decarbonization, energy efficiency, closing resource loops, restoring ecosystem values, as well as enhancing safety and

the quality of life for customers and employees. Positive impact innovation can be described as a form of creating economic, social, and ecological value through breakthrough solutions that benefit the environment and society. These types of innovations emerge as a potential mechanism for integrating positive impact with market activity.

Increasing efficiency primarily pertains to addressing social challenges, i.e., building shared value. Efficiency refers to the ratio of inputs to outcomes. Therefore, we speak of efficiency in creating and delivering economic, ecological, and social value. It is also essential to consider efficiency in creating value for various stakeholders, as well as intergenerational value, attempting to determine the ratio of inputs to outcomes in the process of protecting and developing diverse resources necessary for future generations.

This year's edition of the Positive Impact Startups Report - the fifth one - is an attempt to look into the future. We invited a group of experienced authors who examine the symptoms of change in the world of innovation and impact, the world of expectations, challenges, and opportunities from various perspectives.

By drawing on the experiences of well-known SPW founders and other individuals with a significant impact on the startup environment, we collectively showcase the directions for the SPW ecosystem's development and the opportunities for collaboration with other entities.

The English edition of the Report has been condensed, featuring only carefully selected texts. The previous Report is also available in English. I strongly encourage all readers of this version to engage directly, reaching out to startups

(using links to their webpages that can be easily understood in English) or connecting with the authors of the Report. The Ecosystem of Positive Influence knows no limits.

Thanks to the work of the Positive Panel, we also present the Positive Impact Startups 2023 - the winners of our annual award - for the sixth time. In total, over these years, we have selected nearly 140 startups, of which almost all are still active in the positive impact innovation market, with some rapidly increasing the scale of their positive impact. Among them are providers of positive change and startups that act for the common good or are socially positive, offering positive technologies, necessary services, and products that are good for the world.

The catastrophic effects of climate change on many communities and diverse organizations are already clearly visible. The economic system and the social contract framework are starting to undergo transformation as more and more organizations commit to ensuring a sustainable

future with an emphasis on climate protection. This will be the driving force behind fundamental structural changes in the next few years. This applies to each of us, every project, and every company, both large and small startups.

We need more companies actively improving the state of the world, increasing revenue while solving the world's problems rather than exacerbating them. It is no longer just about reducing the harmfulness of business activities - which is undoubtedly valuable and desirable in itself - but about innovative solutions that lead to ecosystem restoration and respect for human rights. From businesses - both large corporations and startups - we increasingly expect the utilization of knowledge, competencies, skills, entrepreneurship, and appropriate resources in collaboration with other stakeholders to make the world a better place



POSITIVE PANEL 2023

- Adrian Migoń [in](#)
- Aga Maciejowska [in](#)
- Agnieszka Oleksyn-Wajda [in](#)
- Anna Brdulak [in](#)
- Bolesław Rok [in](#)
- Julia Koczanowicz-Chondzyńska [in](#)
- Justyna Markowicz [in](#)
- Karol Gajewicz [in](#)
- Klementyna Sęga [in](#)
- Maciej Otrębski [in](#)
- Magda Andrejczuk [in](#)
- Maryla Wojcieszek [in](#)
- Michał Miszułowicz [in](#)
- Miłosz Marchlewicz [in](#)
- Mirella Panek-Owsiańska [in](#)
- Monika Kulik [in](#)
- Olga Bereza [in](#)
- Paulina Kaczmarek [in](#)
- Piotr Boulange [in](#)
- Przemek Pohrybieniuk [in](#)
- Wojciech Mróz [in](#)

Positive Impact Startups



The selection of this year's winners of Positive Impact Startups was made possible through the work of the Positive Panel members. During the selection process, they relied on publicly available information as well as their own experience and opinions gathered from the broader business environment.

WINNERS IN THE CATEGORY

PROVIDERS OF POSITIVE CHANGE 2023 | Partner: **BNP Paribas Bank Polska**

Power Cob powercob.com

An innovative system combining technologies for the acquisition and processing of agricultural residue - corn cob cores. With years of experience and unique technology, they utilize corn production waste as a high-energy source.

PROTEINrise proteinrise.com

They are developing new advanced technological processes and creating innovative plant-based food ingredients sourced from alternative protein sources. They support producers in creating valuable plant-based food.

SeaSoil theseasoil.com

A climate-biotechnological company that combats plastic pollution by transforming agricultural waste into biodegradable packaging materials that mechanically resemble popular plastics.

Solwena solwena.com

Their Intelligent Energy Management System application tracks energy consumption, automatically analyses areas for improvement, and optimizes device management in facilities to achieve maximum savings during usage.

Karmnik
karmnik.org

They offer natural, healthy products and preserves directly from local producers in the eastern Mazovia and nearby Podlasie regions. Their company operates in line with the zero-waste philosophy, with packaging that minimizes plastic usage.

Las vegans
las-vegans.pl

They produce vegan chocolates in completely compostable packaging. Their mission is to provide clean, simple ingredients, „from bean to bar under one roof,” while avoiding the use of plastic and other synthetic materials.

SERio
serioser.io

A plant-based product that provides balanced nutrition and protein derived from lupin, a lesser-known legume in Poland. They believe that reducing animal-based products and promoting a plant-based lifestyle is the simplest and most effective action we can take for the planet.

System DOT
systemdot.pl

A comprehensive system for distributing cleaning agents and cosmetics in closed-loop reusable packaging. Technological solutions have improved processes such as detergent dispensing, delivery to customers, and cleaning. They operate according to the zero plastic waste principle and aim to minimize their carbon footprint.

WINNERS IN THE CATEGORY
SOCIALLY POSITIVE 2023 | Partner: **Bank Gospodarstwa Krajowego**

GiveAndGetHelp
giveandgethelp.com

This platform provides assistance to individuals facing difficult life situations, such as alcoholism, poverty, and domestic violence. It ensures complete anonymity while offering psychological and legal support from specialists and community support.

Torba-Borba
torba-borba.com

An ecological electric-assisted shopping cart designed to aid elderly people during grocery shopping. The cart features unique global-scale enhancements that address one of the major challenges faced by an aging society - social withdrawal of older people.

UHURA bionics
uhura.pl

A set of voice amplifiers and an innovative small electric larynx. These devices, developed based on their own needs, can solve speech-related issues for people with speech disabilities in an elegant and efficient manner.

UVera
uvera.eu

A fusion of innovation and an interdisciplinary approach through the use of clean biotechnology to produce safe and effective protection against UV radiation, following the zero-waste method, in line with the growing ecological awareness and the goals of the Green Deal. The substance does not harm ecosystems or pose a threat to health.

Gleevery
gleevery.com

A platform that allows stores to introduce a new transaction for their customers - access to products without purchasing them! Their goal is to minimize the negative impact on the natural environment and maximize the lifespan of each rented product.

Mindgram
mindgram.com/pl

A platform that promotes mental well-being through learning to manage thoughts and emotions, supporting the body, and developing a support system through relationships with others.

RetenTech
retentech.pl

Increasing the flood safety of cities in the face of rapid climate changes. They develop advanced autonomous control systems for decentralized retention and flow management in complex sewer systems in highly urbanized areas.

Skriware
skriware.com

A manufacturer of a unique educational laboratory. Teachers can utilize the platform with lesson plans, online spatial design programs, programming tools, and educational-engineering cards.

Clark
clarkk.pl

Menstrual underwear offering an eco-friendly alternative to pads and tampons, in line with the zero waste philosophy, while remaining affordable for everyone. Chemical-free, with a clean composition, promoting products that respect women and their intimate balance.

Figlisto
figlisto.pl

A toy rental service based on the subscription model, with the belief that modelling sustainable behaviours in children can be filled with playfulness while also saving our planet. By breaking the cycle of excessive consumption and making toy reuse the norm for children, they enable conscious consumption for the entire generation.

Laska Nebeska
laskanebeska.pl

They help communicate and promote good ideas and teach responsible and ethical ways of discussing them. The agency's team specializes in communication for non-governmental organizations and positive impact startups. Their expertise lies in social media communication and socializing events.

Urvis Bike
urvis.bike

A comprehensive last-mile delivery solution offering a solid e-cargo bike service on a subscription model as a response to congested cities, the need for faster deliveries, cost savings, and carbon emissions reduction, all while supporting businesses.



Agazi
agazi.eu

They use natural resources and materials with the least negative impact on the environment to produce shoes. They strive to do everything with respect for the planet, environment, and humanity.

ec0lint
ec0lint.com

A tool for frontend developers that reduces the carbon footprint of websites. It provides guidelines for creating environmentally friendly website code.

Planeat
planeat.pl

A 100% plant-based product that replaces minced meat in traditional dishes. They satisfy people's nutritional and taste needs while achieving zero animal use and minimizing negative environmental impact compared to industrial animal farming.

Samo Dobro
samodobro.pl

Their cosmetics are made using plant-based ingredients sourced only from plants grown locally. They donate the entire profit from product sales to support women. The idea is driven by the Feminoteka foundation, which has been providing support to women affected by violence for over 15 years, offering free legal advice, psychological counselling, therapy, and financial support.

Sklep bez granic
sklepbezgranic.pl

By purchasing specific products, individuals can contribute to humanitarian aid on the Polish-Belarusian border. They decide how the money will be allocated, such as for essentials needed by people in the forest, legal support, or covering the costs of humanitarian interventions.

Part I

The World of Innovation
and Impact



1.

Measuring impact through the eyes of startup founders and investors

Grzegorz Floriański, Monika Milej, Ilona Otoka

For-Impact

Defining and measuring social and environmental impact has long been a challenge for responsible investors and businesses that define their role in society beyond mere financial profit. The persistent lack of consensus on measuring social and environmental impact increases the complexity of the investment process, ultimately reducing investments aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

How we tackle this challenge will likely determine the willingness of the investor community to engage more deeply in progressive ventures that align with the SDGs. Therefore, as the initiators of the For-Impact project, we have taken on the

challenge of examining the current obstacles to better measuring the environmental and social impact of impact-driven initiatives in the Polish market.

Working in the design thinking method in collaboration with NextGoodThing, we conducted six interviews with Polish impact startups and six interviews with investors, including business angels and representatives of investment funds operating in the Polish and European markets. We asked our interviewees about their experiences and challenges related to measuring social and environmental impact.

We would like to highlight a few interesting insights we gathered from our interviews.



Investors' Perspective

- **Measuring social impact is challenging.**

This is certainly not a groundbreaking observation. Indeed, how can one assess something as ambiguous as social change in the context of an investment that is expected to yield financial returns? This theme recurred frequently in our conversations. The issue of measuring social impact is undoubtedly a challenge for investors and a reason for the underrepresentation of projects addressing social challenges in investors' portfolios.

While environmental impact seems more quantifiable due to its measurable nature (e.g., CO₂ emissions in kilograms, amount of water saved in the production process, amount of waste generated, etc.), social impact faces barriers to quantifiable assessment based on data indicating the real effect of a particular action. Here's what some of our interviewees had to say about this:"

"Measuring social impact has been a significant challenge for us as investors. That's why we decided to focus on issues related to the environment. In our assessment, the most concrete measure of achievements turned out to be the reduction of carbon dioxide emissions, which has been thoroughly studied, calculated, and can be measured using various indicators."

Maciej Gałkiewicz
CEO Ragnarson

"For now, our involvement in impact projects has been limited to ClimateTech, with one clear KPI: reducing our carbon footprint. Such a goal is easier to monitor and later evaluate its achievement."

Arvin Khanchandani
Investment Manager, Warsaw Equity Group

The complexity of assessing social impact often leads to investors' reluctance to engage in projects that address social aspects in their business models. The lack of knowledge, as well as the absence of appropriate tools and metrics related to the investment context addressing social impact, are unquestionably barriers in this regard.

- **Environmental impact is much easier to measure.**

The quantitative measurability of environmental effects and the availability of methods related to the environmental assessment of products and business processes, such as Life Cycle Assessment (LCA), undoubtedly facilitate investors' decision-making based on hard data. This is also why the ClimateTech sub-segment within the broader Sustainability investment segment has been experiencing dynamic growth. Wojciech Sadowski, CEO & Co-founder of Packhelp, believes that environmental businesses are currently the most highly valued businesses in the world.

"If you have an impact built into your organization, especially an environmental impact, you are rewarded by capital investors worldwide. Many reports show that climate-oriented businesses have higher multipliers, meaning they receive a premium from investors as more resilient businesses."

- **The multitude of impact measurement methods and frameworks does not help us.**

According to some sources, a total of 170 tools and methods have been developed worldwide to assess social and environmental impact (source: "Impact First" by Heidi L. Fisher). Experienced investors say that despite their often advanced knowledge in this area, they have difficulties in deciding which tool, method, or framework to choose for impact assessment.

According to Arvin Khanchandani from Warsaw Equity Group, there is a lot of confusion in the market regarding different frameworks used to approach social and environmental impact in general. There are so many of them that even well-informed investors find it challenging to decide

which tool to use or why to use one method over another. This becomes a significant barrier to entering impact investments because one needs to educate themselves before fully understanding what impact entails.

- **We often encounter greenwashing and other variations such as impact/purpose washing.**

Joanna Namysł, a Business Angel, points out that "not everything with the words eco, impact, zero waste, save the planet actually has anything to do with impact. Education is needed for investors with specific examples."

Some see the potential for limiting greenwashing in the development of solutions that assess environmental footprint based on the aforementioned Life Cycle Assessment (LCA)

methodology. LCA involves tracking the sources of product creation throughout the entire value chain and thus providing reliable data on the environmental footprint of products.

- **We need simplification and standardization.**

Investors would like to use tools and methods for impact assessment that are simple, intuitive, and preferably based on quantitative measures. Here's what some of our interviewees had to say:

"Such a tool would make sense, but it has to be user-friendly, time-efficient, intuitive, and show tangible results, possibly incorporating an element of competition and gamification."

Joanna Namysł
Business Angel

"We concluded that when it comes to impact KPIs, there will always be a problem with greenwashing, or we won't be able to measure the declared impact well, or it won't be ideal for most startups we invest in. Therefore, we opted for simplicity – reducing our carbon footprint."

Arvin Khanchandani
Warsaw Equity Group

- **What's your plan for impact?**

The most well-known model for planning social and/or environmental changes is the Theory of Change, where investors or startup founders formulate a specific hypothesis regarding the intended impact. However, we have learned that Polish impact startups seeking funding do not present their theories of change explaining the causal relationships of their activities, services, products, and their contribution to solving social and environmental problems they address.

Wojciech Mróz, a Board Member of Ashoka.org and co-creator of ImpactAngels.pl, shares his experience as an impact investor, stating that last year he assessed 60 impact companies, none of which, if he remembers correctly, had a prepared impact theory based on the Theory

of Change methodology. He encourages impact entrepreneurs to formulate precise impact theses within their business strategies, which could facilitate the process of evaluating and measuring a startup's impact.

"As an impact investor, I would like every impact project to have a well-thought-out Theory of Change that explains in an understandable way how the direct results of the startup's actions, i.e., its products and services, contribute to solving the social and environmental problem that the startup aims to address within a specific timeframe."

Wojciech Mróz
Business Angel

- **But let's not fool ourselves into thinking that a magical tool will suddenly appear.**

Many organizations are attempting to standardize and harmonize methods for assessing social and environmental business impact. The most well-known initiative is the Impact Management Project. However, some investors express scepticism about whether a single magical method can be developed in the near future. Maciej Gałkiewicz, CEO of Ragnarson, shares the following reflection:

"In the investment industry, there is still insufficient development of thinking about the impact of investment activities on the social and natural environment. We still lack experience and necessary knowledge in this field. The tools and methods used leave room for speculation, and each of them focuses on a different aspect. It is hard to expect that a single magical tool or method will solve all the problems related to the challenges in measuring the impact of investments. It seems more likely that the next decade or so will be spent on developing a better understanding of these issues."

Founders' Perspective

- **We are rarely asked about our impact.**

When asked if they are asked about their social and environmental impact, startup founders respond that it rarely happens, if at all. If such questions arise, they usually concern environmental impact, which currently receives more attention from investors and the general public.

"I have the impression that we pay more attention to being an impact startup. However, in reality, there are very few startups that explicitly talk about their impact and an impact that is placed higher than the business factor."

Bartłomiej Rak
Rebread

"Usually, when someone asks us about our social and environmental impact, it happens during acceleration programs, and it's often international accelerators."

Weronika Czaplewska
Vice President of Envirly

- **We need hard data to demonstrate our impact.**

This is not easy, as mentioned above, especially for startups addressing social challenges. Piotr Ciszek, CEO of Resql, shares his experience in this area:

“Our stakeholders demand hard data that proves that our service actually works. For our startup, obtaining such unequivocal data is somewhat more challenging. We are not binary. We have quite a few indicators of effectiveness, and often they are ambiguous. That’s why we are working on the most accurate form of verification.”

Hard data often comes from direct feedback from the startup’s stakeholders. Gathering such information requires more effort. According to Weronika Czaplewska, Vice President of Envirly, “best practices in social impact measurement are

based on research with test and control groups. This works. But it’s also a barrier because such research is quite expensive and cannot be done on an ongoing basis.”

- **How to capture real impact?**

For startups addressing social challenges, transitioning from measuring activities and direct effects of their operations (e.g., the number of organized trainings, the number of app downloads) to a higher level of impact measurement, where real changes in the quality of life for recipients resulting from using the organization’s services and products are assessed, seems like the next stage of initiation into the art of social impact measurement. Some of our interviewees are aware of the need to elevate impact measurement to a higher level. Here’s what one of our interviewees said:

“For example, you can measure the number of users using a particular app, but you also need to capture how it affects them. Does it improve their mental health, for example? Or maybe not. It’s very difficult to measure such things.” – Weronika Czaplewska, wiceprezeska Envirly

- **Impact is more a part of our operations and processes than a marketing element.**

It is important to distinguish between more mature startups on their impact journey, which have evolved from being unaware of their impact to being fully competent organizations in this area, and those that are just beginning their journey, such as those in the pre-seed stage. Mature organizations perceive the goal of measuring impact as a way to improve their processes and operational models. We noted the following statement in the context of describing the competencies of a sustainability department employee in a mature startup:

“This person never wants to talk to the media about impact because it is not their priority, nor do they have such ambition. Our discussions about impact are not about marketing; they are more about operational and process-related issues.”

Wojciech Sadowski
CEO & Co-founder of Packhelp

This does not mean that the communication element of impact is trivialized in these organizations, but it is evidently a secondary element.

- **We do not have enough time to present our impact ideas to investors.**

Can impact-driven startups with social and/or environmental missions expect more attention from investors than other startups? It turns out that this is not necessarily the case. Bartłomiej Rak, Co-founder of Rebread, tells us:

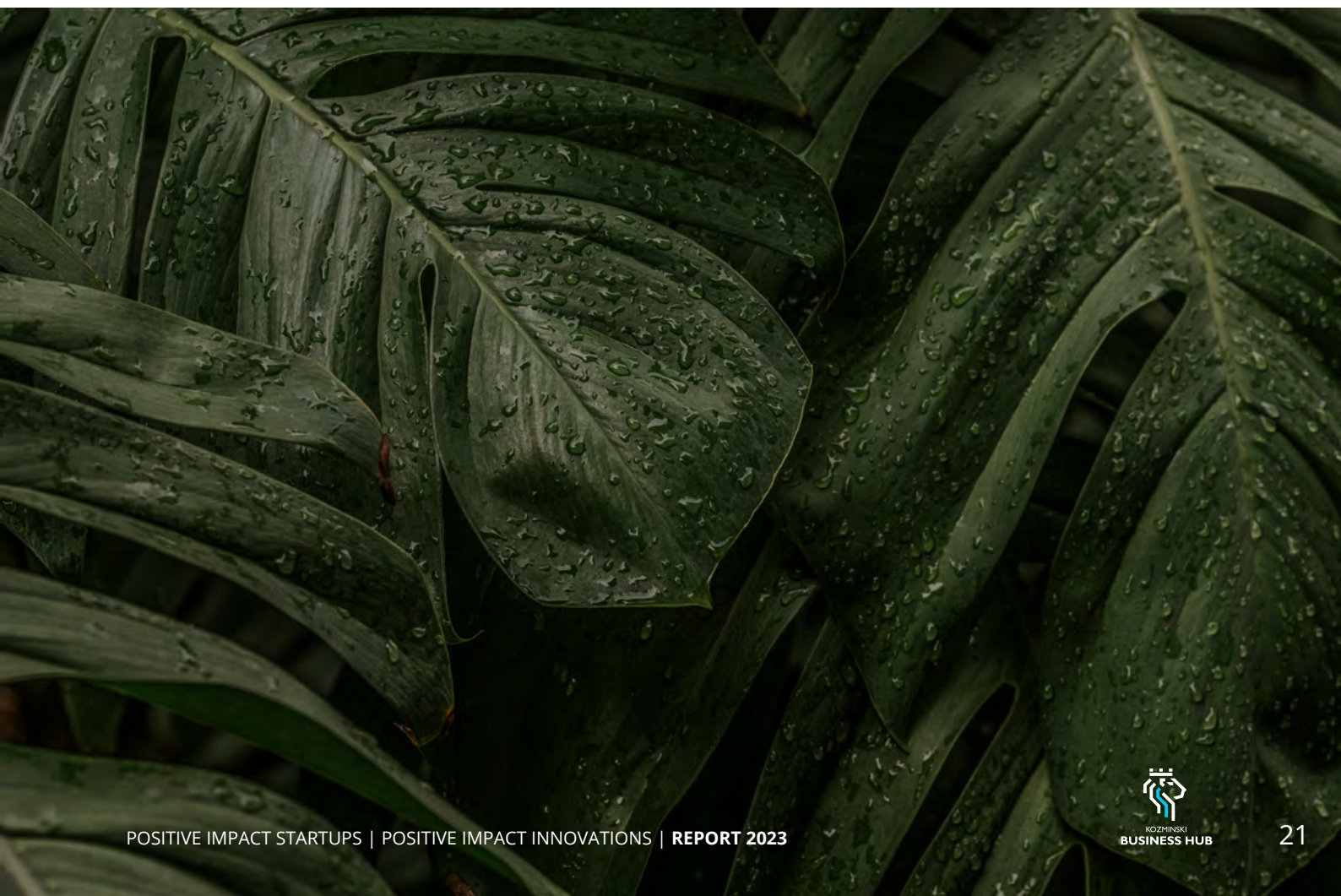
“The startup ecosystem is built in such a way that you need a super presentation for investors. We used to have 15 minutes for such a pitch, now it’s down to 5 or 3 minutes. As an impact startup, we don’t want to fit into those frameworks. It’s unfair for entities whose aspiration is to solve global problems to be subjected to the same competition as startups whose main goal is to make money. We won’t go far if we don’t allow impact-driven entities to have presentations longer than 3 minutes.”

In our opinion, this is a justified demand, but how to convince investors of this...

- **In what context should we place our impact?**

The ability to demonstrate impact in a certain context or compare it to a benchmark is important for some startup founders who grapple with answering the question of whether what they are doing is good enough. Katarzyna Kolanowska, Co-founder of Karmnik, says:

“We can count the kilometers traveled... but what do we compare it to? That’s the problem. The problem lies in the context, not the measurement itself because measurement is simple. Furthermore, the more complex these calculations are, the less attractive the information is to the end recipient. No one will be able to replicate or question them. That’s also the problem with the reception of such complex data.”



From our conversations, the image of an still immature market for impact investments in Poland emerges. The number of investors interested in the concept of impact investing remains very small. Due to the difficulty of measuring social projects, environmental topics dominate, hence the boom in ClimateTech investments (which are also very important, to be clear). According to dealroom.co, climate action (SDG13) and clean and affordable energy (SDG7) are still the most frequently funded Sustainable Development Goals.

As one of the quoted interviewees points out, we should not expect a sudden appearance of a magical and reliable tool for measuring social and environmental impact. However, investors and startups should not give up on their attempts, even if their measurements are imperfect. As an old Chinese proverb says, "A diamond with a flaw is better than a pebble without one." Let us remember that creating and perfecting the financial measurement system we know today took decades. "Thinking about risk also does not require 100% accuracy – it only requires accuracy that can be relied upon."¹



¹ Sir Ronald Cohen "Impact. Reshaping Capitalism To Drive Real Change"

2.

The development of the sustainable fashion startup market

Agnieszka Oleksyn-Wajda

Legal Counsellor, Director of Institute for Sustainable Development and Environment, Lazarski University

The sustainable fashion startup market is currently at a stage of intensive development, but still has a long way to go. This state of affairs is due, among other things, to the fact that the textile and clothing industry (commonly referred to as the fashion industry) has not been subject to in-depth analyses or legal rationing in terms of its environmental and climate impact in the past. Meanwhile, the accelerating fast fashion trend violates not only environmental but also ethical social standards.

European Commission's Strategy for Sustainable and Circular Textiles a 'mine of ideas' for circular start-ups

With the growing awareness of human impact on the environment and climate, especially in the last decade, efforts are being made to reduce this impact, including through new business models. This phenomenon has gained significant momentum in the fashion industry in the last year, which has to do with the Strategy for Sustainable and Circular Textiles (hereinafter 'the Strategy') announced by the European Commission on 30 March 2022. The Strategy aims to change the current model of production and consumption of textile and clothing products.

According to the document, by 2030 textile and clothing products placed on the EU market are to be sustainable and recyclable, largely made of recycled fibres, free of hazardous substances and produced in compliance with social rights and environmental requirements. Consumers, according to the Strategy, will benefit longer from high quality textile and clothing products available at an affordable price, fast fashion will go out of fashion and cost-effective reuse and repair services will be widespread.

The aim of the Strategy is on the one hand to increase the durability of products and prolong the use of garments, and on the other hand to support closed-loop business models such as reuse, rental, repair, retailing of second-hand goods. Startups that develop and market such models can become leaders in this paradigm shift. Although still a niche market, with the Fashion Transformation Strategy, their importance is expected to grow and gain weight.

New technologies and saving resources, or how not to use 2,700 litres of water to produce one T-shirt

Startup markets tend to focus on innovative solutions that are able to change traditional approaches to production and consumption. As a result, startups are able to bring innovative products to market that are produced in a more environmentally friendly way, while also being economically competitive. For startups, especially those related to technology and innovation, the Strategy offers many opportunities for growth and expansion. Innovation in the next generation of fabrics, fibre properties and textiles that protect against harmful external factors (e.g. air pollution) is - due to the changing climate - a highly desirable development direction. The design solution that will displace 'physical construction' over time, reducing waste, will be digital design.

Technological innovations are not only used for manufacturing and design. New solutions to reduce overproduction are clothing collections that are not in physical form, but only in virtual,

digital form. Startups offering digital clothing are becoming increasingly popular in the fashion sector, especially among those who link their professional activities to social media.

Another area where startup activity is important is in saving resources. This is because startups can design solutions that reduce the use of water, energy or chemicals in production processes. Examples in this area include water recovery technologies, energy savings in the production process, or the use of natural or biodegradable dyes.



Firstly - prevent. Secondly, repair.
Third - be a recycling innovator!

Due to the fact that the fashion sector generates a large amount of waste on both the producer and consumer side, it is worth looking at the development of startups through the lens of waste handling. The first in the waste hierarchy is waste prevention. This principle can be implemented primarily by reducing the amount of goods purchased and produced. Examples of startups that aim to reduce the amount of clothing products produced are those that resell and rent clothes that are already on the market.

According to the ThredUp Resale Report 2023 on the second-hand clothing market, it is estimated to be worth \$350 billion globally by 2027. James Reinhart, CEO of ThredUp, pointed out in his introduction to the report that the resale of second-hand clothing is only just beginning to flourish. Although we are still in the early days of replacing overproduction with second-hand

clothing resale, there is no coming back from it, according to James Reinhart. Interestingly, along with the report, ThredUp has also released its 'Fashion Footprint Calculator', which allows you to calculate your environmental footprint if you buy clothes and calculate the reduction if you buy second-hand clothing.

In recent years, second-hand clothing (including luxury) sales platforms have started to emerge worldwide, including in Poland. Clothes rental start-ups are becoming increasingly popular - either in the form of stationary clothes rental stores or platforms that allow the rental of outfits for various occasions. The concept behind clothes rental is that customers can rent clothes for a short period of time instead of buying them permanently. Mainly these are occasional clothes (gala, prom). However, startups are already emerging that rent so-called everyday clothes, such as a jeans rental company.

Another way to prevent waste is to design for recycling, i.e. to think about the life cycle of a product from design to reuse. Eco-design was identified in the Strategy as one of the key transformational elements of the fashion sector. So startups that are already designing with recycling in mind and with recycled textiles will soon gain a competitive advantage in the market. It will be important to design in a way that allows the garment to be easily separated into parts and recycled separately, choosing materials that are easily recyclable, avoiding elements that hinder the recycling process. In addition, bringing new eco-friendly materials to the market is part of the start-up's eco-design strategy.

Another method of dealing with waste is to prepare it for reuse. Startups that repair damaged products, clean them, refurbish them are those entities that give 'new life' to products. A footwear refurbishment and repair startup has been growing in the Polish market for several years now. Today, this practice is becoming more and more popular, and thanks to this, items or their usable parts that would have become waste are given a new use value.

The next step in the waste hierarchy is recycling. It allows material from already used products to be reused, thereby reducing carbon emissions and the use of natural resources. Recycling in the fashion sector has become an important topic in recent years, also from the perspective of proposed legislation. In the European Union, including Poland, business concepts involving

fibre recovery and reuse are emerging. Recycling in the form of fibre-to-fibre is still a rarity, but composites made from textile waste are already gaining in popularity, for example to replace wood. These are used, for example, in benches, flower pots and fences. Start-ups developing new methods of recycling textiles will be a welcome group of business players in the fashion sector.

Another type of converting used or unwanted clothing into new products of higher value is upcycling. Garment upcycling startups offer solutions that help reduce the amount of waste generated by the garment industry and increase environmental awareness among consumers. Already existing startups specialise in upcycling clothes from other fashion brands.

In the Polish market, the concept of upcycling is also becoming more popular and promoted. Startups in this area can create clothes and accessories from materials obtained from overproduction or second-hand clothing, curtains, blankets, discarded fabrics by clothing companies, unnecessary advertising banners, sailor bags and other waste materials. These start-ups further demonstrate that upcycling clothing can help to reduce waste in the clothing industry, as well as increase consumer awareness.



Teach others how to be a good ancestor

Yet another area where fashion startups can play an important role is in responsible consumption and awareness-raising and education. Startups can create platforms and tools to help consumers make informed choices about their textile purchases. Examples include apps that track the origin of garments, assess their environmental impact, or platforms that verify certifications, production and products and their environmental impact. Startups can engage in education and promotion of sustainable practices among both consumers and textile manufacturers. This can be done by organising workshops, social campaigns or creating educational content.

Be guided by signposts

The sustainable fashion sector is at a pivotal point in its development, as more and more consumers, manufacturers and investors are beginning to recognise the need to make changes to protect the environment and sustainability. Startups have great potential to spread sustainability by introducing innovative solutions that can revolutionise the way we design, produce and consume clothing. The EU Textile and Clothing Strategy is already playing a key role in the changes taking place as a signpost for the development of the sustainable fashion industry and areas where innovative positive impact startups can thrive.



3.

Future food to save the planet?

Maciej Otrębski

Strategic Partnerships Manager, RoślinnieJemy

It is probably no surprise to many that the way we produce food today significantly burdens the environment. Industrial animal farming alone, according to conservative estimates, is responsible for nearly 15% of greenhouse gas emissions and is one of the main causes of ongoing deforestation in the equatorial rainforests, all while causing suffering to billions of animals each year.

Therefore, it should come as no surprise that alongside activists and organizations focused on climate, environmental issues, and animal welfare, innovators and entrepreneurs are joining forces to redirect the food system towards a more equitable and less exploitative direction, using technology and leveraging new (and sometimes rediscovered) resources and processes. In recent years, startups have emerged all over the world that seek ethical and efficient solutions to feed nearly 10 billion people by 2050. In 2023, amidst the challenges posed by climate change, startups are also grappling with financial crises, inflation, and spikes in energy and commodity prices due to Russia's aggression in Ukraine. Despite the challenges they face, there may never be a better time for startups focused on the challenge of alternative protein production.



New protein

The main areas where startups focused on alternative protein sources are developing include plant-based alternatives to meat and dairy, cellular agriculture for meat production, and, more recently, a growing emphasis on precision fermentation processes and the use of mycoproteins (protein derived from fungi). Among these areas, plant-based production is the most mature.

Alternatives to meat and dairy have been available on store shelves for many years, but it was the approach taken by startups like Beyond Meat and Impossible Foods from the United States that somehow changed the „rules of the game.” Their ambition is to create plant-based meat products that do not compromise on taste, texture, aroma, eating pleasure, or nutritional value compared to traditional animal-derived meat. The innovative approaches of these project

leaders, their collaborations with international restaurant chains, and Beyond Meat’s record-setting debut on the Nasdaq stock exchange have legitimized the business potential inherent in the new meat (and dairy) segment. This has led to a global increase in interest in alternative protein production and the emergence of hundreds of additional companies seeking to revolutionize our approach to consuming animal-based products.

It is worth noting that the past year has been a significant challenge for the entire plant-based sector and for Beyond Meat as a brand leading the plant-based transformation. The decline in stock value and lower-than-planned sales levels have resulted in layoffs and dampened investor sentiment.

Nevertheless, plant-based startups are emerging practically everywhere, and some have solidified their position in domestic markets. Among the numerous projects in the alternative meat segment, noteworthy ones include THIS from the UK, Tindle Foods from New Zealand, Israel’s Redefine Meat, and Apollo, a local producer of plant-based chicken alternatives.

In parallel with the plant-based market, startups focusing on cellular agriculture for meat production are also developing. This method involves obtaining animal proteins by multiplying muscle cells in specially prepared reactors, eliminating the need for animal slaughter. According to forecasts, this production method could be significantly less environmentally costly (although currently, at the non-commercial, laboratory scale, it is quite energy-intensive). Above all, it could provide a solution to the challenges of changing the meat paradigm as a key component of the diet and the resistance to reducing meat consumption. Ultimately, cell-cultured meat will be exactly the same product as conventionally sourced meat. Pioneers in this segment include Upside Foods and GOOD Meat from the UK, Mosa Meat from the Netherlands, and Aleph Farms from Israel.

What is important is that a number of companies are focusing on different elements of the cell-based meat production process, as well as on different types and species of meat. VOW from Australia

produces cell-based fat, Gourmey specializes in cell-based foie gras, and Finless Foods focuses on seafood. In Poland, LabFarm is working on cell-based chicken meat.

Increasing attention is also being given to the possibilities offered by precision fermentation processes (previously used, for example, in the production of microbial rennet or insulin). Its utilization allows for the acquisition of ingredients that were previously only available from animal sources. Perfect Day from the United States produces whey and casein using this method, which is commercially utilized by several ice cream brands and even Nestle, offering animal-free whey chocolate. Every Company produces egg protein in this way as well.

Protein derived from insects is also seen as an alternative protein source. However, it is worth noting that the majority of insect protein is used as animal feed, which ultimately may slow down the transformation of the food system and the shift away from the intensive industrial farming practices we know today.

New directions in the development of plant-based products market

The alternative protein market is not only dedicated to consumers. Many startups are focusing on developing B2B solutions. A great example is the aforementioned Perfect Day, French company YUMGO, which offers egg alternatives for the pastry industry, and the brand BeBetter, which has developed a plant-based butter alternative for gastronomy. Focusing on developing plant-based solutions for the food industry that allow for the same level of quality as animal-based products is important because it removes the responsibility from consumers for making a more conscious choice, allowing them to continue enjoying their favourite pastries or ice cream.

Slightly less recognized, but perhaps less emotional, is the development of startups reimagining traditional plant-based protein sources that can be seen as staple foods - products that, according to recommendations such as EAT Lancet, should permanently be part of our daily diets. Products such as tofu or tempeh (a traditional form of processing soybeans and other legumes), as well as legumes themselves, presented in accessible and attractive forms for consumers, also offer

space for product innovation. A great example is Better Nature from the UK, which offers tempeh in the form of seasoned bacon-like pieces or BBQ-marinated options. In this segment, where innovation meets tradition, it is also worth mentioning Bold Bean, which offers high-quality legumes in attractive packaging, helping consumers change their perception of legumes in a more positive way.



Alternative protein sources in Poland

According to the Good Food Institute report on plant-based product sales in Europe, including our domestic market, the value of the plant-based market in Poland reached approximately 1.5 billion PLN in 2022. **Plant-based alternative categories are growing faster than categories of animal-based food.** In 2022, the sales growth of plant-based milk, yogurt, and cheese categories exceeded the growth of their animal-based counterparts. However, it should be noted that they currently account for approximately 0.5% of the total shopping basket value for Poles.

The plant-based startup scene in Poland is primarily developing around the **Foodtech.ac**, accelerator, which supports young Polish foodtech initiatives in their dynamic development process. The viability of the domestic plant-based startup market is evidenced by the fact that over twenty companies, mostly from Poland, applied to participate in last year's Plant-Powered Pitching competition dedicated to plant-based innovators. The winning brands, Serio, a producer of lupin-based cheese alternatives, and MyEgg, a startup offering egg alternatives, subsequently debuted on the shelves of leading retail chains.

It is promising that most of the plant-based companies established in recent years are still in operation, and some of them have grown to the extent that they may no longer be considered startups. The previously mentioned Apollo, Bezmięśny, and WegeSiostry (in which Hochland has invested) are excellent examples of this. However, Polish startups face a range of challenges, including difficulties in attracting investors, financial liquidity, and often a lack of readiness from the mass consumer to choose more ethical and sustainable products.

„The process of developing a new product and bringing it to market is a daunting challenge. In this aspect, we encounter problems typical of startups and young manufacturing companies. The main problems revolve around acquiring funding and managing cash flow. This is especially troublesome in the context of inventorying the product. We purchase production ingredients at the minimum logistical level, which need to be stored with the hope that they will be used before their expiration date. At the same time, one must closely monitor every expense, forecast cash flows, and seek investors, funds, or other sources of financing that will allow us to sustain until revenue generation.”

Arkadiusz Kleszcz
co-founder of MyEgg



Piotr Grabowski, co-founder of foodtech.ac, also recognizes the challenges associated with the current market situation and difficulties in obtaining capital. „The biggest challenge for Polish plant-based startups at the moment is the market situation. Rising costs of raw materials and production resources, declining private consumption, and price pressure make it harder for startups to develop technologies today because they have to focus on current challenges. Moreover, reduced availability of investment capital due to the economic cycle hampers the pace of their growth.”

It is worth noting the plant-based projects that have their roots in academic institutions, such as Napiferyn Biotech in Łódź, which has developed a method of using rapeseed press cakes to produce high-quality protein, or ProBioVege from the University of Szczecin, which also utilizes press cakes to produce alternative dairy products.

However, it is noticeable that most plant-based startups in Poland, even those that are doing exceptionally well, stem from strictly artisanal production. It would be desirable for more deep innovation in the category of plant-based food to emerge in Poland as well.

Towards a just future

The development of startups in the alternative protein sector could be the subject of a doctoral thesis, and this short article can only modestly attempt to shed light on the topic from a global and national perspective. Further analysis should also examine other regions of the world. Asia is one of the most dynamically developing and progressive areas for foodtech innovation. In 2022, \$2.9 billion was invested in the alternative protein sector, while, according to McKinsey, \$100 billion was invested in energy sector innovations during the same period.

We must change the way we approach food production today. To continue the development of projects that will enable a real transformation of the food system and a departure from environmentally costly and unethical practices, further support is necessary—not only from a consumer perspective but primarily in terms of facilitating access to both private and public capital.



4.

Future food as the task for positive impact startups and B corps

Paulina Kaczmarek

Head of Sustainability, DANONE Group

I am delighted that another edition of the impact startups report is being released, and as DANONE, we are proud to be a partner in this program.

In the area of sustainable production and consumption, we need new business solutions, and this applies to the food industry as well. The current food system is responsible for about one-third of all greenhouse gas emissions and occupies 50% of the habitable land on Earth. It utilizes 70% of water resources, and 78% of global pollution of oceans and freshwater is the result of global food production. As a society, we waste one-third of the food produced worldwide.

At the same time, as indicated by the "Ziemianie Atakują" (Earthlings Attack) research by Kantar, 74% of Poles take into account issues related to sustainable development. We are concerned about waste pollution (35%), climate change (35%), and droughts (40%). We can either continue with the current economic practices or seek new

business models. New solutions and technologies can help us with this. Clearly, changes are needed at the political, economic, and social levels. But importantly, the new companies featured in this year's report demonstrate the power of entrepreneurship in taking responsibility for the world around us.

At DANONE, we have been taking a series of actions for years to have a positive impact on the environment, which enabled us to meet the stringent requirements for B Corp certification in 2022. Starting from our dual commitment in 1972 to economic development and caring for the environment, when our former organization's owner, Antoine Riboud, announced in Marseille that "the responsibility of a company does not end at the office door or factory gate," to DANONE becoming an "Enterprise a Mission" in France as the first publicly traded company in the country.

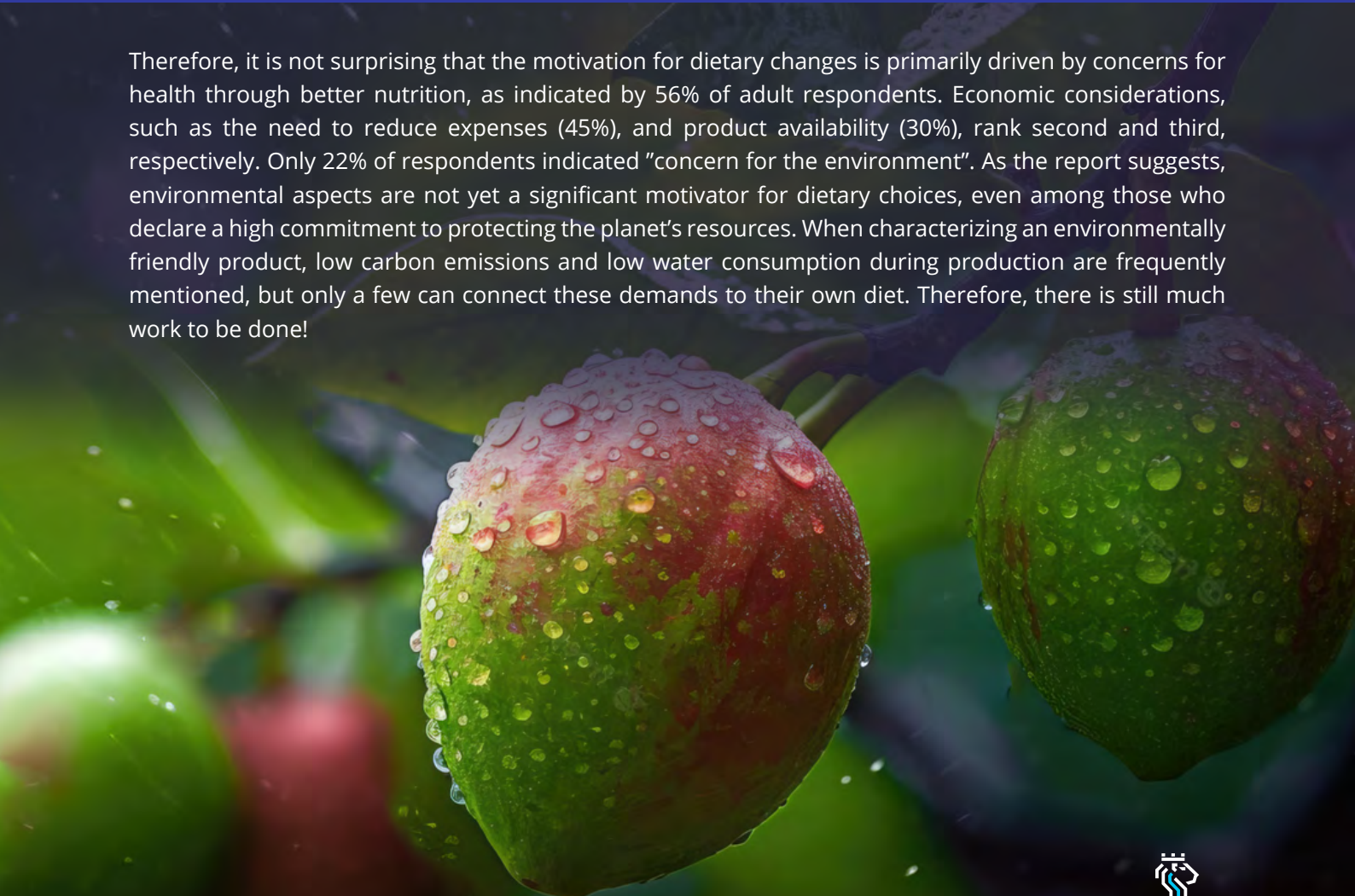
In Poland, we are implementing regenerative agriculture practices with our milk suppliers. Over half of the milk sourced from 250 farms that goes into products manufactured by DANONE in Poland comes from farms practicing these methods. It is also worth noting that 100% of the electricity used in our factories comes from renewable sources.

We have adopted emission reduction targets in line with the Science-Based Targets methodology, aiming for a 1.5-degree trajectory. We were the first to announce a commitment to reduce methane emissions from the fresh milk production process by 30% by 2030 compared to 2020. Our previous actions and plans are summarized in the Positive

Impact Journey strategy. Over the past 20 years, investments in social projects in Poland have reached PLN 111 million, which has been allocated to health, nutrition, and ecological education, biodiversity and water resource protection, support for local communities, and combating food waste.

Last year, we established an expert think tank, the Interdisciplinary Centre for Analysis and Collaboration "Food for the Future." Leading scientists and undisputed experts in their fields collaborate within this initiative. The first outcome of their work is the "Plate of the Future" report, which effectively illustrates the impact of daily dietary choices on both individuals' health and the condition of the planet. It also sets directions for changes and trends. The role of dietary changes in Poland cannot be overestimated, as an improper diet is associated with the risk of cardiovascular diseases, type 2 diabetes, certain cancers, and obesity.

Therefore, it is not surprising that the motivation for dietary changes is primarily driven by concerns for health through better nutrition, as indicated by 56% of adult respondents. Economic considerations, such as the need to reduce expenses (45%), and product availability (30%), rank second and third, respectively. Only 22% of respondents indicated "concern for the environment". As the report suggests, environmental aspects are not yet a significant motivator for dietary choices, even among those who declare a high commitment to protecting the planet's resources. When characterizing an environmentally friendly product, low carbon emissions and low water consumption during production are frequently mentioned, but only a few can connect these demands to their own diet. Therefore, there is still much work to be done!



The experts from the think tank recommend a planetary diet, which is a flexitarian diet. It involves reducing the consumption of red meat and sugar by half and doubling the consumption of fruits, vegetables, and plant-based legumes. Adopting this diet could prevent up to 11.6 million premature deaths worldwide by reducing the risk of diet-related diseases while benefiting the planet.

At DANONE, we promote a flexitarian diet, which was also recognized during the B Corp certification process. Auditors from B Lab appreciated the shift in our business model from producing and selling only dairy products to producing and selling both dairy products and their plant-based alternatives. Last year, our life cycle assessment (LCA) study showed that the carbon footprint of a 1-liter plant-

-based beverage is 19-26% of the carbon footprint of 1 liter of milk. The carbon footprint of soy-based beverage is just 19%, equivalent to 0.42 kg CO₂. When we consider the water footprint (5L vs. 11.4L) and the land area required for production (0.55 m²/year vs. 2.15 m²/year), soy beverage also performs very favourably.

We want more Polish companies to join the B Corp movement, especially impact startups for whom this could be a milestone in terms of thinking about business impact or international expansion. The idea of such certification, aligned with the concept of regenerative capitalism and the B Corp movement, gives hope that we are not doomed for disaster and that a transition to new regenerative business models is possible. The B Corp movement also indicates the direction of change—it is not just a visually appealing certificate but a new logic of economic systems that is increasingly reflected in systematic actions related to the codification and implementation of ESG frameworks.

The B Corp standards in various areas, as well as the Impact Business Models developed by B Corp, serve as a guide for impact startups. It is clear that some of the impact startups presented here are already implementing selected impact models in the environmental and consumer areas.

Therefore, as DANONE, we are launching a support program for impact startups in collaboration with Kozminski Business Hub. Our goal is to support selected startups in the B Corp certification process, shaping their sustainable development activities to become engines of responsible

competitiveness. To echo the words of David Attenborough, "We are very good at destroying, but we could also be very good at rebuilding." This is my wish for the entire ecosystem of impact startups and the B Corp movement, both in Poland and worldwide.

Part II

The World of Startup
Collaboration



1.

Bank cooperation with startups

Michał Miszułowicz

Director of Innovation Sector Cooperation at BNP Paribas Bank

Working in a bank is very unique - operating at the heart of the economic ecosystem provides an opportunity to collaborate with various industries present in the market. Moreover, such collaboration requires at least a basic understanding of the specificities of many sectors of the economy. This is necessary to assess collaboration opportunities and customer needs accurately and to offer them appropriate and effective solutions.

Knowledge of financial sector regulations is also crucial - both those defining the operating rules for financial institutions themselves and any restrictions or safeguards regarding customer operations (such as anti-money laundering or GDPR). This situation means that we must be somewhat conservative, meticulously adhering to the requirements of existing regulations and our own commitments, as well as honouring the trust placed in us by customers and shareholders.

At the same time, we should be flexible and innovative. To meet these expectations, we decided to leverage the experience of entities

built on innovation and changeability, constantly seeking new business models and effective ways to meet customer requirements and expectations.

Cooperation with startups at BNP Paribas Bank officially began in 2017 with the implementation of a simplified procurement process - Office Hours. It is a series of meetings with startup representatives during which we seek innovative ideas that can streamline the bank's operations or enrich its offerings. This process allows us to invite the most innovative companies to collaborate and implement business solutions that are the best fit. To date, over 20 editions of Office Hours have taken place.

Startups are primarily a source of innovation, unconventional solutions, and access to new business fields for us. Because we understand the principles of startups and innovation well, in 2022, we launched a banking offering for innovative

companies. Through this, we are building an innovation ecosystem in collaboration with the bank and our clients. This holistic approach creates many opportunities for jointly creating value for all parties involved.

Startups as suppliers

Effective collaboration with startups is the best way to implement and develop innovation. It requires an approach based on professionalism as well as pragmatism. Therefore, at BNP Paribas Bank, we thoroughly examine the actual technological and product capabilities of innovative companies with whom we want to start collaborating. The recent "innovation trend" in the corporate world and the pressure for billion-dollar valuations from Venture Capital funds have encouraged entrepreneurs to take a somewhat overly optimistic view of reality and make promises that have no chance of being fulfilled. Such an approach not only eliminates the chances of establishing cooperation but also increases the level of distrust towards the entire ecosystem. However, it is hopeful that we can find numerous positive examples of collaboration in the market. I would like to mention a few such examples that demonstrate the effective implementation and development of innovations at BNP Paribas Bank.

Autenti

Electronic contract management and document signing are the foundation of digital transformation. By eliminating paper, it becomes possible to create new processes and products that are not only convenient and efficient but also reduce an organization's carbon and water footprint. Paper is definitely not an environmentally friendly solution - not only its production but also the logistics of the supply chain contribute to high CO₂ emissions.

Our cooperation with Autenti began in 2018 with the implementation of electronic signatures for the instalment loan process in brick-and-mortar stores. After 5 years of collaboration, we have incorporated Autenti solutions into several

processes in various areas of the bank, and we are progressively adding more. Thanks to Autenti, we have saved over 4 million sheets of paper since the beginning of our partnership.

Our cooperation is based on transparency and trust. We are well aware of Autenti's capabilities in introducing new solutions and we develop in line with those possibilities. We can always count on honest feedback regarding our ideas for new processes. The relationship we have built over the years has already resulted in two capital investments by the bank in Autenti. We measure the benefits of this cooperation not only in business criteria but also in environmental terms due to the reduction in paper consumption within the organization. It is an exemplary example of a startup-corporation relationship.

EcoBean

Another startup worth mentioning in the context of positive impact is EcoBean. The company specializes in collecting coffee grounds and extracting five fractions of raw materials, including lactic acid, for the production of biodegradable polymers used in the bank's headquarters. Our collaboration was supposed to start with a pilot project in the first quarter of 2020. Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we had to put the test implementation on hold. We resumed or rather initiated the collaboration in 2022, after returning to the office and regular functioning of the office spaces. We also initiated cooperation with EcoBean in other companies within the BNP Paribas Group in Poland.

The technology offered by the startup aligns with the circular economy concept - it transforms potential waste into a new product. This allowed us to see our waste in a completely different light. Although the bank does not specialize in coffee, its employees consume significant amounts of it. Through collaboration with EcoBean, we can

contribute to waste reduction. In our nearly year-long cooperation, the startup has processed over two thousand kilograms of coffee grounds, giving them new life. The interest of our colleagues in the company to use the coffee ground collection and pickup solution has led to the inclusion of additional bank locations in the pilot program.

Envirly

In 2022, as part of the mentioned Office Hours process, we were looking for a provider of a carbon footprint calculation tool for businesses. After evaluating over 30 innovative companies, we decided to collaborate with Envirly. What had a decisive impact on our decision was the readiness of the product, as well as the technological and business creativity and openness of the startup's founders. We were looking for a partner with whom we could enhance our offering and help our corporate clients in their green transformation and meeting upcoming reporting requirements.

Envirly not only showed us an attractive and intuitive product but also presented ideas for further cooperation. Although the product itself - an online platform for reporting emissions data (part of the ESG information reported by companies) - does not directly reduce emissions,

it provides users with reliable information about emissions, helps meet EU requirements for non-financial reports, and builds a competitive advantage for companies that decide to reduce their emissions.

However, when it comes to ESG reporting, the tool itself is only half the success. Reporting, standardized at the European Union level, requires ensuring that the applied methodology complies with official guidelines. Envirly holds the TUV Nord certificate, allowing users to demonstrate the compliance and reliability of their calculations. Currently, we are conducting a joint pilot program for our corporate clients, and based on these experiences, we will build the target business model for collaboration.

Startups as Customers

During our intensive collaboration with the startup ecosystem in Poland, we have noticed enormous business potential - our relationship can be mutual. With our knowledge, we have a much better understanding of the needs of innovative companies, their characteristics, and possibilities. That is why in 2022, we created an offering for innovative firms. Through this offering, we have the opportunity to support startups with expertise and build an innovation ecosystem around the bank.

We offer our innovative clients not only banking products and services but also valuable networking opportunities - both among our more traditional corporate clients and investment funds, as well as within the BNP Paribas Group. Our actions

are focused on building long-term relationships based on trust and understanding. After a year of operation, we can proudly say that we have collaborated with around 100 startups and leading venture capital funds.

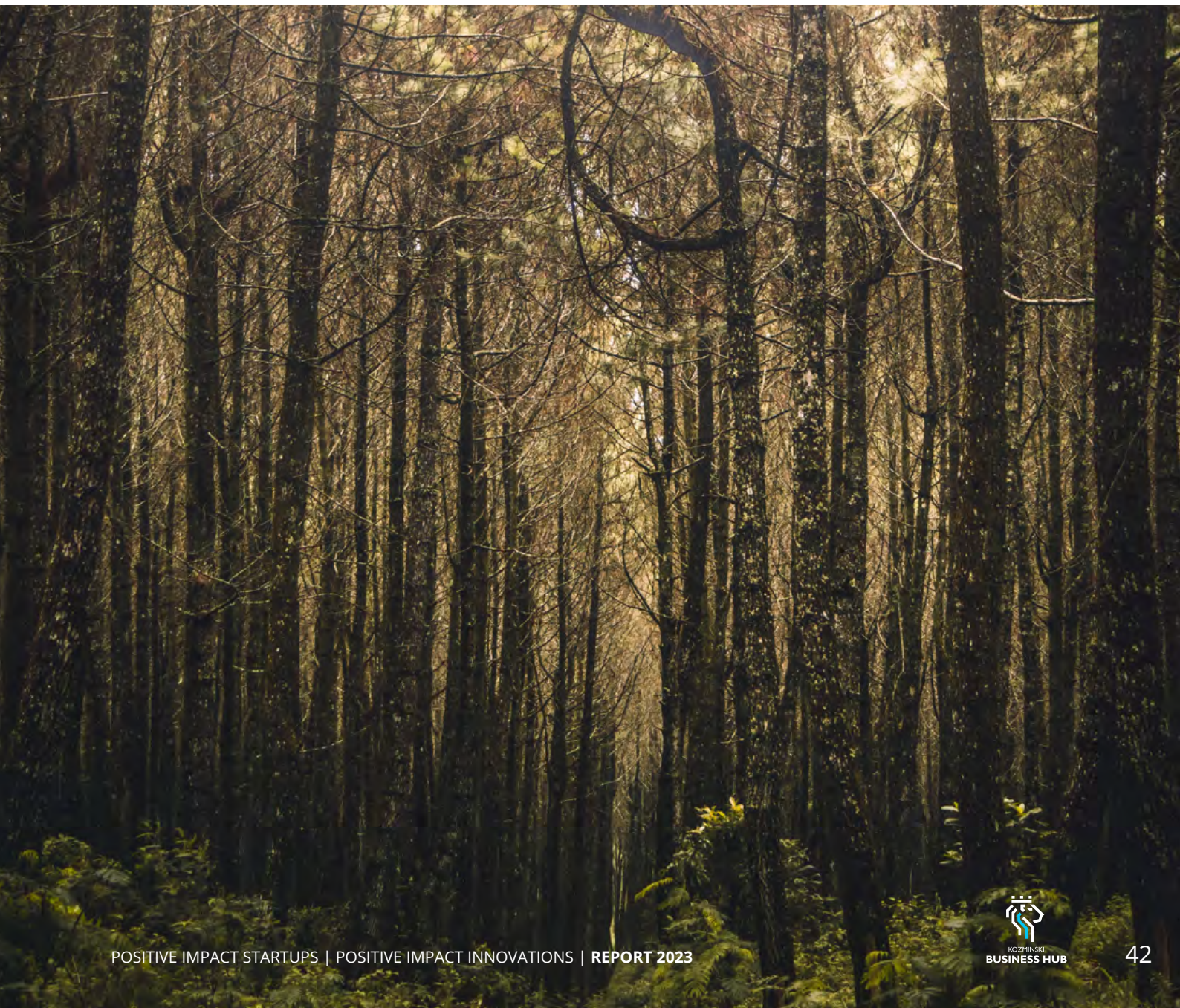
Innovations in sustainable development have always been of particular interest to us. I must admit that this is one of the more challenging areas to build a business in. As a rule, sustainable development is associated with investment costs, the returns of which are either spread over a long period or largely expressed in non-financial values. This contradicts the old business models based on profit maximization and cost minimization.

Regulations from the European Union regarding emissions reduction, for example, provide a necessary impetus for change. Of course, each industry faces its own regulations and provisions. Whether it's packaging or manufacturing, to maintain competitiveness and access to capital, every business must incorporate sustainable development solutions into its business plans. Growing consumer awareness also has an increasing impact on companies' investment decisions.

I believe that it is a very good time for startups offering products and services with a positive impact. However, it is important to remember that alongside terms such as green transformation, energy efficiency, or circular economy, greenwashing has also emerged. Terms like ESG, SDGs, and sustainability have become fashionable and are used by many companies as marketing buzzwords that can drive sales. Therefore, it is crucial to prioritize transparency, honesty, and a responsible approach to business. Not only for ethical reasons but also due to the potential sanctions for misleading customers.

I still believe that the most important aspects of collaboration with innovation are honesty, transparency, understanding of the business, and mutual trust. Especially considering the inherent uncertainty of innovation and the high risk associated with startups. Without these values, it will be impossible to jointly create innovative products and build a better future. In the context

of sustainable development, it is also crucial to analyse the consequences of our actions. After all, sustainability should encompass the entire business, not just a piece of it. Such an approach requires a fundamental change in the way we think about conducting business and considering the long-term and wide-ranging consequences of our activities.



2.

Supporting the development of the Polish startup ecosystem

that is how startups and Żabka Group benefit from cooperation

Karol Gajewicz

Head of Venture Studio, Żabka Group

Żabka Group, a leading convenience store chain in Poland, is committed to building partnerships for positive change and supporting innovation. Therefore, we closely monitor new initiatives and invite entities offering solutions that support the development of the convenience ecosystem to collaborate with us. This task is carried out by Venture Studio, a specialized unit that analyses the current business needs, trends, consumer insights, and seeks promising startups. Acceleration programs such as Foodtech Lab, Startup Impact Program, and Żabka Future Lab play a significant role in this support.

Żabka Group collaborates with startups that create innovative solutions for the retail industry, particularly in the areas of e-commerce, q-commerce, and Direct to Consumer (D2C). We join forces with local startup organizations and international acceleration programs, allowing us to reach a broad group of innovators. Our three proprietary programs include: Żabka Future Lab, which focuses on startups creating future-oriented solutions; Startup Impact Program, designed for impact-driven startups; and Foodtech Lab, which supports startups innovating in the food sector.

The Venture Studio within Żabka Group identifies challenges faced by specific business areas and identifies growth opportunities. This helps us determine the priority directions for seeking solutions, following the spirit of open innovation.

When selecting startups, we consider their alignment with our business strategy, including responsibility and growth potential, while taking market trends into account.

By continually expanding and improving our convenience ecosystem, Żabka Group can offer young companies and entrepreneurs the opportunity to implement their products or solutions on a large scale. Innovators appreciate this opportunity. In 2022, the Venture Studio team analysed applications from 1,335 startups from 69 countries, met with over 100 entities, and invited 13 of them to pilot their products or solutions.

The best startups receive consumer tests, commercial pilot programs, and even financial support for further development. Collaborating entities can access sensory laboratories and receive expert assistance. Another significant benefit

is the numerous opportunities for establishing relationships crucial for business development. An invitation to further collaboration by Venture Studio means the opportunity for startups to work with all entities within Żabka Group.

Żabka future lab

It is the flagship acceleration program of Żabka Group. Its priority is to search for innovative companies whose ideas can contribute to the development of the convenience ecosystem, mainly by offering customers new services, streamlining logistics, or optimizing operations. Each of these innovations represents another step for Żabka Group towards becoming a global leader in the retail industry.

Startups selected through Żabka Future Lab have the opportunity to test their products and services not only in over 9,000 stores, including autonomous Żabka Nano stores but also in logistics centres. They can also gain access to the infrastructure of Żabka Group's partners.

Among the winners of the first edition of Żabka Future Lab is Virbe, a platform that enables the creation of interactive 3D avatars and their use in customer service. Żabka is testing them in autonomous Żabka Nano stores to facilitate shopping for customers and take their experience to a new level.



Startup Impact Program

Big changes consist of a series of small decisions made every day. Żabka Group, through its Venture Studio, actively seeks startups working on solutions that facilitate consumers' transition to better shopping habits - both for themselves and the planet. In line with this vision, the Startup Impact Program is carried out in collaboration with Kozminski Business Hub (KBH) - an organization dedicated to identifying and supporting startups affiliated with the Kozminski University. This acceleration program is aimed at young companies whose goal is to make a positive impact on the environment, focusing on areas such as ecology, health, and entrepreneurship. KBH and Żabka Group have already successfully conducted two editions of this program.

Startups proposing interesting solutions in four areas can participate in the Startup Impact Program.

Innovative projects in the "Entrepreneurship Development" category should focus on developing skills and competencies of entrepreneurs in the context of the modern economy. In the "Well-being and Equal Opportunities" category, desired projects are those that improve the well-being of children and young people, with a particular emphasis on mental health and emotional balance, as well as solutions that facilitate self-reliance and entry into the job market for socially disadvantaged youth.

The "Reducing Environmental Footprint" category includes initiatives aimed at capturing and neutralizing carbon dioxide from the air and increasing energy efficiency. This category also

encompasses projects related to innovative and low-emission refrigeration of food products and innovative methods of reducing food waste in the value chain.

In the "Packaging of the Future" area, alternatives to plastic materials suitable for recycling or composting are sought, particularly those that can be used for packaging food products.

Winning projects from the second edition of the competition include the development of technology for rapidly cooling beverages without

using electricity (E-ice), production of biopolymers (Seasoil), and the creation of intelligent composters suitable for urban and even office use (Vermico).

Foodtech Lab

Foodtech Lab is another initiative by Żabka Group that aims to give young entrepreneurs the opportunity to co-create innovative food products that can facilitate consumers in making conscious choices related to good nutrition and sustainable lifestyles. The Foodtech Lab acceleration program was launched in October 2022 and targeted startups from across Europe.

Among the solutions submitted were innovative food products (utilizing innovative ingredients), alternative protein sources (plant-based substitutes, proteins derived from fermentation), lab-grown meat (cultured or cruelty-free meat produced in vitro or tissue engineering), functional food (products enriched with innovative and functional ingredients), packaging solutions (supporting recycling and reusability, intelligent

and eco-friendly packaging), initiatives to reduce food waste (waste management and processing, expiration date monitoring), food processing technologies (innovative technological solutions in food processing), food production (innovative technological solutions in food production), and consumer applications (applications improving consumer interactions with the food industry).

In the first edition of Foodtech Lab, 140 startups from 20 countries participated. The winners included SERio - plant-based cheese made from lupin; BIO COOLS - cryogenic, vegan ice cream; New Granny - functional protein-rich coffee beverages; Small Giants - snacks based on natural alternative proteins; and Fermentful - plant-based kefir beneficial for gut flora. The winning startups will have the opportunity to pilot their solutions within the Żabka Group ecosystem.

Żabka Group was awarded in the second edition of the "CREATORS of the Polish Startup Scene" ranking, created by MamStartup in cooperation with PFR Ventures, for its efforts in seeking innovation and contributing to the development

of the Polish startup ecosystem. The company received recognition in the "Organizations and Innovations" category, with the judges acknowledging its strategy of supporting domestic startups through accelerator programs.

3.

Can social entrepreneurship be incubated?

Adrian Migoń

Youth Business Poland

Incubation and acceleration programs for social entrepreneurs are becoming increasingly popular tools that enable the development and increased effectiveness of social businesses in achieving their social goals. They provide entrepreneurs with tools, knowledge, and support that facilitate the growth of their enterprises.

Just like in the case of running a traditional business, incubation or acceleration support can significantly accelerate the development of a social enterprise or impact startup. The fundamental business and market principles remain the same.

However, before discussing the benefits of incubation, it is important to clarify the terminology. Social entrepreneurship is an approach to conducting business that combines financial profits with pro-social or environmental values. Impact startups are companies that

utilize technology and business activity to solve social and environmental problems. Both entities work for the betterment of the world, but what distinguishes startups is their potential for rapid growth and scaling.

When scaling a traditional business or startup, the focus is on expanding their scope of activities and profits. In the case of impact startups, scaling also involves increasing their positive impact on the environment. Research confirms that investing in social entrepreneurship and impact startups has a positive impact on the economy, society, and the natural environment. For example, the report "The Power of Social Innovation" prepared by McKinsey & Company states that social enterprises contribute to poverty reduction, improved education, and a better quality of life in society. Therefore, investing in and supporting impact startups can significantly expedite important social changes.

In my 15-year journey of supporting the development of various social enterprises and initiatives, I have encountered two most common types of impact startup founders.

The first group consists of individuals who have a sense of mission and create companies to change the world for the better. Through their activities, they aim to solve significant environmental, social, or health problems. They believe that their solution can make a difference, help others, and at the same time, earn a living and engage in meaningful work. The second group consists of individuals who create startups that have a positive impact on the environment, although it was not defined as a necessary condition. Founders of such startups identified a problem and devised an innovative solution, with the positive impact on the planet or people being more of a "side effect" that emerged coincidentally during their work. In both situations, incubation can significantly contribute to the accelerated growth of the company.

Incubation activities nurture the seed, hence the term "seed and pre-seed" often used in startups. We have a seed, which is the embryo of the company in its initial stage, and we place it in an incubator. This incubator is nothing more than an incubation or acceleration program that supports founders in transforming their project into a company through the right approach and tools. Incubation usually applies to projects in the earlier stages of development, before market validation and the creation of a minimum viable product

(MVP) that can be tested in the market. Acceleration programs, on the other hand, often provide assistance at a later stage, involving scaling, sales, process optimization, and fundraising. In Poland, however, this boundary is quite flexible, and we often come across acceleration programs that operate in both the early and later stages. When choosing a support program, it is important to familiarize oneself with the activities of a particular accelerator or incubator and determine whether it is suitable for the business needs of the startup.

Starting with the clarification of terminology, we can now address the issue of effectiveness. As mentioned earlier, we discussed two groups of people who engage in project development driven by mission or business motives. In an incubator, novice entrepreneurs can gain a solid dose of knowledge, inspiration, contacts, and tools that help them develop their businesses faster, more efficiently, and smarter. Often, inexperienced entrepreneurs do not know how to run a business. They have an idea but are stepping into unknown territory. At this point, they can either venture into the jungle with a machete or find a guide who knows the terrain and can help them reach their destination. This is where the incubator comes in. A good incubator supports entrepreneurs in testing their business concept, prototyping, accessing initial customers, sales, instilling a growth-oriented mindset, and various other areas. This often involves a structured path of business workshops, access to experienced mentors and advisors, and support in building valuable connections with other aspiring entrepreneurs and investors.

Over the years, while implementing approximately 15 acceleration programs for technology startups and impact-driven ventures, I have observed that these activities significantly support novice entrepreneurs in business development. When a

startup founder comes with a mission to change the world for the better, they often lack the necessary knowledge to achieve this change. An incubator is a place where they can access this support, often free of charge.

Last year, as part of our activities at Youth Business Poland, we had the opportunity to support the acceleration of around 40 impact startups. The most commonly mentioned benefits included assistance in refining the business model, support in developing a sales process, the opportunity to establish partnerships with business partners and customers, adopting a more business-oriented approach, increasing brand visibility, and support in investor discussions or fundraising efforts.

An example of success from the Mazovian Startup acceleration program was Karmnik, a company that created an online platform delivering high-quality food products, fruits, vegetables, and preserves from local farmers in the Mazovia region. During the acceleration program, Karmnik considered various financing options. Through the workshops, they learned about crowdfunding

and the potential of community-based financing for business development. After analysing the founder's actions, they embraced the plan and launched a crowdfunding campaign. This was supported by hard work and dedication from the founders of Karmnik, but they managed to raise over PLN 470,000 through crowdfunding.

In Poland and abroad, numerous well-known impact startups are making a positive change in the world through their actions. Interestingly, these startups operate in various industries, including food, energy, healthcare, education, and industry. Here is a list of a few interesting startups that combine innovative technologies and business development approaches with significant positive impact on our environment, health, and life:

Plantalux	A family-owned company from Lublin producing lighting that optimizes energy consumption in greenhouses by over 50%.
Foodsi	An application that helps reduce food waste, already helping save over 6 tons of food.
Phibox	A solution that helps correct postural problems among children, consisting of an application and a device that uses games and play to assist children in performing daily exercises.
Wycieczkomat	Automates the organization of school trips for schools and parents, helping children develop their interests and relieving teachers and parents from unnecessary formalities.
Doctor.One	A platform enabling doctors to run high-quality private medical practices on a subscription-based model.
Nanosci	Innovative air purification technology based on nano-layered photocatalytic systems.
Ecobean	Technology that gives a second life to coffee waste. After processing, the residues become components for medicines, cosmetics, or food products.

All of the above-mentioned companies are rapidly growing, combining business development with a positive social and environmental impact. Will they change the world? Perhaps they will influence certain aspects of it. Just as large corporations in the past neglected the planet and abused the trust given to them, these smaller companies can set new trends through scaling their actions.

As Youth Business Poland, we support impact startups because we see that their activities significantly contribute to implementing positive changes in the world. We conducted our first project for impact startups back in 2016 in response to the increasing number of applications from people who wanted to do something good

for others and the planet. Since then, we have been observing a growing number of submissions that have a positive impact on our lives. Often, young and aspiring entrepreneurs say that they don't want to create an ordinary company; they want to create one that has a purpose and can do "something good."

This is a positive trend, as is the fact that Poland has its own unicorns, companies with a valuation of at least \$1 billion, such as Allegro, E-obuwie, and Docplanner, as well as numerous promising technology startups with revenues exceeding hundreds of millions of Polish zloty. Hopefully, a Polish impact startup will soon join the unicorn ranks.

For those who have an appetite for this and are seeking support in the development of their startup or project, we invite them to apply for the ongoing recruitment in the fourth edition of the comprehensive acceleration program for impact startups called Mazovian Startup: mazovianstartup.ybp.org.pl



4.

Viewing impact investments through a gender lens

Filip Wadowski, Justyna Markowicz

NESsT

Taking a gender lens approach in investing allows us to address gender equality, empower women and girls, and promote inclusive economic growth and decent work for all. Investing in women-led enterprises and creating conditions for women's development is one of the key objectives of impact investing. Investing in and supporting women is also a catalyst for positive change in achieving the other Sustainable Development Goals, including poverty reduction, climate crisis, education, health, peace, and security. Moreover, women have tremendous potential to generate economic growth; we just need to unlock it.

According to the International Finance Corporation, women-led businesses have the potential to create millions of jobs and contribute billions of dollars to the global economy. Compared to men, women reinvest a larger portion of their earnings back into their families and local economies. Women often take the lead in sustainable development initiatives, particularly in areas such as agriculture, forestry, and water management. By supporting initiatives led by women, we can promote more sustainable and environmentally friendly practices. Additionally, women (as well as representatives of all non-dominant majority groups) often bring fresh perspectives and innovative ideas to the organizations they work in.

What is Gender Lens Investing (GLI)

Gender Lens Investing (GLI) is a strategy or approach to investing that considers gender-related factors throughout the investment process to promote gender equality and make better investment decisions.

For NESsT, as an impact-first investor, promoting gender equality, just like creating quality jobs for marginalized individuals, is a primary action. We consciously invest in companies that address

the most pressing social and environmental issues. Initiatives supporting gender equality are considered one of our human rights activities.

NESsT's comprehensive GLI strategy focuses on measuring gender equality issues, raising awareness on the topic, and building operational capabilities related to gender equality among the enterprises we invest in. It provides tools not only to assess our portfolio of social enterprises and the communities they operate in terms of gender equality but also to optimize our investment capital more effectively. By following this strategy, we aim to scale up and improve our impact while contributing to changes in the perception and functioning of women in society.

How to get started?

At NESsT, we started with the saying "Practice what you preach," which, in the context of GLI, meant expanding our impact metrics in 2019 to include indicators showing the participation of women as suppliers for companies in our portfolio and among the employees placed in the job market by those enterprises.

Our data for 2022 shows that 54% of all jobs created by our companies are for women, and 49% of managerial positions are held by women. Among our portfolio companies, 33% are women-led, and 22% have gender-balanced boards. The expansion of impact measurement also prompted

us to count the number of female and male founders within our companies, examine the gender ratios in their management and advisory boards, and analyse gender pay equality in these organizations.

The profitable impact of women in enterprises

These data are not just statistics for us. They serve as reference points for discussions on employment policies and wages in the companies we invest in, guiding our advisory efforts and financial support. We inspire and encourage changes that promote gender equality, primarily by referring to the "business case" for such actions.

Gender Lens Investing is one of our strategies to improve the business performance of the portfolio we invest in. Teams that prioritize gender equality have a better chance of achieving better business and financial results. Furthermore, examples

from our portfolio demonstrate that companies actively incorporating women into their ranks are more innovative in creating solutions to combat exclusion and poverty, as well as being able to create more sustainable and high-quality jobs.

GLI is not limited to businesses led by women only

Gender metrics serve as guidelines for our investment policy, but it does not mean that we exclude impact startups or SMEs founded by men. In such cases, we discuss strengthening women's employment, especially from marginalized groups, and their inclusion in decision-making bodies. We work together to set realistic goals. These actions have practical motivations. We aim for the greatest impact and business success for the companies we support, while reducing operational risks.

Ensuring representation is key

We cannot achieve these goals without active and real participation of women. It is essential to consider the voices of women and understand the realities in which they function, with various limitations and barriers. In our case, it is important to embrace different perspectives and listen to the voices of women from diverse backgrounds - those with low incomes, from rural or small-town areas, as well as indigenous populations or marginalized communities.

Opportunities for impact startups in Central Europe

At NESST, we continue to learn and expand our thinking on Gender Lens Investing. Earlier this year, we launched the Violet Fund, which invests in small and medium-sized enterprises striving to create quality jobs in line with Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) principles. As an impact-first investor, our goal is to facilitate access to the job market for individuals from marginalized groups, including LGBTQIA+ communities, ethnic minorities, migrants, refugees, disadvantaged youth, persons with disabilities, and women. Our intention is to work with companies that are open to all individuals, regardless of their background, religious beliefs, disabilities, or sexual orientation.

Examples from the NESsT portfolio:

Mamo Pracuj is a social enterprise dedicated to facilitating the reintegration of women, especially mothers returning from maternity leave, into the job market in Poland. Founded by Agnieszka Czmyr-Kaczanowska and Joanna Gotfryd, the organization offers mentoring, advisory services, and training that empower women to stand out during the recruitment process and excel in their roles after employment. Since its establishment in 2011, Mamo Pracuj has created an influential and widely recognized network for women, supporting their professional development. NESsT's investment enabled the enterprise to launch the Women's Talent Bank, a platform called Talenti.pl, which connects women with quality job opportunities.

Mamo Pracuj

Examples from the NESsT portfolio:

Movimento Black Money is a social enterprise that enhances the economic power of Black individuals in Brazil. MBM's services aim to support the well-being, autonomy, and financial inclusion of the Black community in Brazil. One of MBM's products, Mercado Black Money, is an online platform that connects buyers with over 1,500 businesses owned by Black individuals, with 70% of them being women-led. Managed by the remarkable leader Nina Silvia, under whose leadership MBM has experienced significant growth, Nina Silvia has been listed among Forbes' "20 Most Powerful Women in Brazil" and has been recognized twice by Bloomberg as one of the 500 most influential people in Latin America.

Movimento Black Money (MBM)

Examples from the NESsT portfolio:

Maré de Sabores is a social enterprise that operates in Maré, one of the most densely populated slum complexes in Brazil and the largest in Rio de Janeiro, with approximately 140,000 residents. Mariana Aleixo and Helena Edir founded the company to help women in the region build their financial independence. They provide training, professional experience, and job opportunities in the gastronomy sector, particularly for low-income single mothers. Maré de Sabores' main business line offers catering services for events, weddings, and other gatherings in the Rio de Janeiro area. Before the pandemic, Maré de Sabores was hired to serve 113 events, creating permanent employment for 18 women and contract-based employment for 44 women. So far, the enterprise has trained over 750 women in gastronomy services and helped 160 women find employment in the industry.

Maré de Sabores

Part III

The World of Change
and Expectations



1.

What kind of work for gen Z? Dignified, well-paid, and genuinely necessary

Zuza Karcz

Dom Spokojnej Młodości, OFF school Foundation

For some reason, commentators on public life have developed a liking for these types of divisions and discrepancies - whether it's based on age or any other characteristic of individual identity.

Age as a personality trait

But when it comes to age, it's probably not my only personality trait, even though I often focus on this dimension. Age is quite clear because the passage of time, along with the passing years, is well known to us as humanity, and the multitude of ways to measure their passing is highly developed. Indeed, the experiences of different events (or their absence) are a common point for entire, million-strong groups of people from different „generations.” We won't find more common ground - especially on such a wide scale. So when I am asked whether young people see their professional future in socially impactful companies, I think, as befits a student of social studies: it depends.

Since age is not the only characteristic of identity that a young person possesses, it is clear that other factors contribute to their personal worldview and the capital they will possess - from financial

to social and cultural. Environmental factors will certainly play a significant role, such as family, immediate surroundings, as well as education or the lack thereof.

With the developing standards of gender equality and the resulting behavioural patterns in the job market, today's „Gen Z” (as I define Generation Z as individuals born after 1995 and before 2010) have more frequently observed the participation of both parents in household budgeting. Another significant experience for this generation in relation to the job market is what is known as „euro-orphanhood” since the early years of this generation coincide with the time just after Poland's accession to the European Union. How does this translate into behaviour in the job market? And does it mean that this generation differs in any way from the previous one?

Working mothers, fathers abroad, 16-hour workday

I remember the reactions my tweet received: „I don't know life without the European Union, and I don't want to know life without the European Union” - that I don't know life at all and should still be learning. What if I am learning thanks to the European Union, at work? This connection may seem entirely obvious, but let me explain: the European Union, as an organization that aimed to strengthen economic integration from its inception, has led to equalizing opportunities in the job market by establishing universally applicable laws for all participants within this market. Without discrimination or barriers to movement. Such safeguards allow for more peaceful career planning, and as a result, a more peaceful vocational education.

I vividly remember the discussion that took place on Polish Twitter regarding work. It is not my intention to take sides between Adrian Zandberg and Professor Marcin Matczak; I just want to remind you of the figure of the „16-hour workday.” This figure, trimmed by discourse, has no reason to

exist for my generation other than being an object of laughter: here the issue revolves around the awareness of individual rights, which should be an obvious basis for maintaining standards between the state and the citizen in a liberal democracy.

Is it too much to expect internships to be paid from the perspective of a student? If we think about the social responsibility of organizations, we should start with such obvious issues as recognizing work as a valuable commodity that deserves compensation. The realization of human rights in the workplace, and therefore building corporate social responsibility, starts from the basics and can extend to other aspects of identity. We were raised in the European Union, and we have the right to demand these inherent European standards that are in our DNA. Before implementing well-being initiatives, consider, dear employers, whether this value system aligns with your core beliefs.

A shelter in exchange for a smile?

When I ask a student of European studies about their dream job, they list specific characteristics, such as good communication, working with people, and the ability to creatively implement their ideas. On the same day, I connect with a Polish student who is exploring her interests in China, and I feel that my job doesn't even exist yet. Another student, already with a master's degree, expresses a desire to work with open-minded individuals who won't judge her based on her previous education or professional experience. These are very abstract requirements. How do we measure them?

A good workplace doesn't exist in a vacuum, even in terms of values. Considering the need to meet basic standards - from salary to working hours - we should think about how, when hiring a young person, we can integrate them into the organization on a level beyond a mere exchange

of goods. Age is one aspect, but the profession itself is also part of an individual's identity. In the era of „identity politics“ at every level of social institutions, it is worth considering how a profession can reflect individual needs and serve as a natural field for self-expression.

Social responsibility? Genuine social responsibility that builds a sense of agency and is not just built around PR fireworks. Can we talk about supporting diversity, equality, and inclusion (DEI) if the basic legally required solutions are not followed? Can we implement innovations if they are not effectively communicated internally within the organization? Achieving strategic goals must happen at every level, including the junior level, which is often served by young individuals.

So, how can we create such actions in a way that the people working with us have a sense of agency, both during their creation and implementation? During our conversations, a very concrete solution emerges between the lines: allocating time for activities that can take place in real-time, during work hours. We are not talking about employee volunteering - that's a different story. When discussing ideas, someone mentions visiting an animal shelter during working hours. I smile upon hearing that.

Yes, it's a single voice, perhaps isolated. Personally, I wouldn't choose this particular solution. But I smile because it is simple and doesn't require anything more than a conversation about the needs of employees. I didn't ask for detailed preparation before the conversation. That's not what qualitative research is about.

I smile because finding solutions can be simple if we listen effectively enough. And who knows, maybe this metaphorical visit to an animal shelter during working hours will pave the way for more comprehensive solutions to come with greater ease?

Comment at the end

Youthfulness does not exempt us from the ability to articulate our own needs or possess our own values. On the contrary, visions like Nassim Taleb's „Antifragile” are resurfacing in the debate about our future. If we can align our products and services with market needs, it is high time we seize the opportunity to listen to the needs of our employees. With full acceptance of who they are and where they come from - their age, experience, or culture. The ability to adapt may now be the highest measure of entrepreneurship itself.



2.

How to search for meaningful work?

Dobrosława Gogłóza

Doing Good

The time we spend at work occupies a significant portion of our lives. We can view it as a necessity, as work provides us with the means to live and enjoy our free time. However, it can also be a highly satisfying time that gives us a sense of belonging, develops our skills, and provides a sense of purpose in life. When we look back and think about the most satisfying moments, they are usually not just about vacations but about achieving goals, overcoming obstacles, and putting in a lot of effort. Often, these memories are associated with professional accomplishments.

The fact that work plays such an important role in our lives raises our expectations towards it. According to a PwC report on the future of the workforce, three-quarters of respondents worldwide would like to work in a place that has a positive impact on society. In Poland, the percentage is even higher, reaching 81%. Increasingly, we want our work to be something more; we want to combine meeting our own needs with contributing to solving environmental and social problems. However, the question remains: how do we find such work?

Define the positive impact (for yourself)

It's worth starting by asking ourselves about the area that particularly interests us. For one person, it may be addressing the climate crisis, while others may be more drawn to directly helping people, promoting transparency and democracy, or improving access to education and culture. If it's challenging for you to answer this question, the first step may be exploration, which involves reading, listening to podcasts, or participating in webinars to gain knowledge and identify the scope of activities in which you most want to participate. In the process, you may also discover related areas that can be equally attractive.

It's also valuable to look at this process from the perspective of companies or non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that may be seeking employees. They are also interested in finding people for whom the employer's mission is important, and having knowledge

about the problem that a particular company or organization is solving can make you stand out in the recruitment process. It's not just about finding interesting job postings but also effectively going through the recruitment process, performing well in interviews, and ultimately securing the position.

Harness the power of weak ties

Narrowing your search to specific impact areas can also help you leverage your connections to better map out the field in which you want to work and potentially learn about open job opportunities. According to sociologist Mark S. Granovetter, the author of the study "The Strength of Weak Ties" published in 1973, our closest contacts—friends and family—may not be the key to finding a job. Instead, it's people with whom we have less frequent contact who can provide access to new networks and information. They may know about interesting companies looking for employees or open job positions.

Try to identify individuals in your extended network who are already involved in the field you want to work in. If you can't find such individuals, ask your acquaintances to indicate people in their circles who are connected to the area of your interest, and request an introduction. Then, arrange a meeting and learn as much as possible about

companies, think tanks, NGOs, and opportunities for employment in the area that interests you. Don't hesitate to ask for such support, even from people you don't know. I have been asked for such consultations multiple times, and I always agreed. People generally want to be helpful, so it's worth relying on this trait.

Choose a good work environment for yourself

If this is not your first job, you probably already know what kind of work environment suits you best. Keep in mind that the opportunity for positive impact exists not only in NGOs but also in startups, the public sector, or large companies. If you have doubts, ask people who work in each of these sectors. Each sector has its specific characteristics that can make you feel like a fish in water or quickly become discouraged. You need to know whether you prefer a fast-paced work environment often accompanied by a bit of chaos, typical of startups, or a mature organizational culture and benefits that are mainly available in larger companies (which, on the other hand, may be too slow and bureaucratic for other individuals). This step is crucial when looking for any job, not just one with a particularly positive impact, but it is very important for long-term satisfaction.

Now that you know the impact area in which you want to work and the type of organization where you can best develop your talents, you can start making a list of companies and organizations that interest you the most. It may turn out that there aren't many employers that combine both needs, so you will have to decide what is more important to you – the impact area or the work environment. It will be easier to adapt and compromise if it is a well-thought-out decision.



Increase your chances

I have already encouraged you to have conversations with people who can tell you a bit about the impact areas that interest you. During these conversations, also talk about yourself and your experience to receive honest feedback on your chances of landing your dream job. Remember that sometimes a big change may mean taking a step back and starting work at a lower position than your current one.

Through such conversations and analysis of job requirements in your areas of interest, you may realize that you need to better prepare for such a change and dedicate time to acquiring additional skills or experience. Explore training opportunities or consider volunteering in organizations that operate in your field of interest. These steps will

not only demonstrate to future employers that you are committed and willing to develop but also provide an opportunity to expand your network with people from the industry in which you want to work. This can be useful both during the job search and when you start your dream job with a sense of purpose.

Check out Doing Good

It would be difficult for me not to mention my own project, which is specifically addressed to people like you. I have been working only in places that have a positive impact on the world for many years, so I understand the need to search for such work. I have been asked for support and advice on finding meaningful work many times, and it was one of the inspirations behind creating Doing Good—an impact job portal. We post job ads in selected impact areas, including CSR/ESG, nature conservation, human rights, health and quality of life, sustainable food, culture and art, and independent media. On social media, we also share information about grants and internship opportunities, which can be a first step towards your dream position.

When searching for work with a positive impact, it is very challenging to identify employers who operate in interesting areas. Doing Good addresses this challenge. We connect people seeking meaningful work with employers who genuinely care about

their employees and are committed to fulfilling the company's mission. It's still an early stage for this project, so feel free to contact me if you have any ideas on how to improve it.

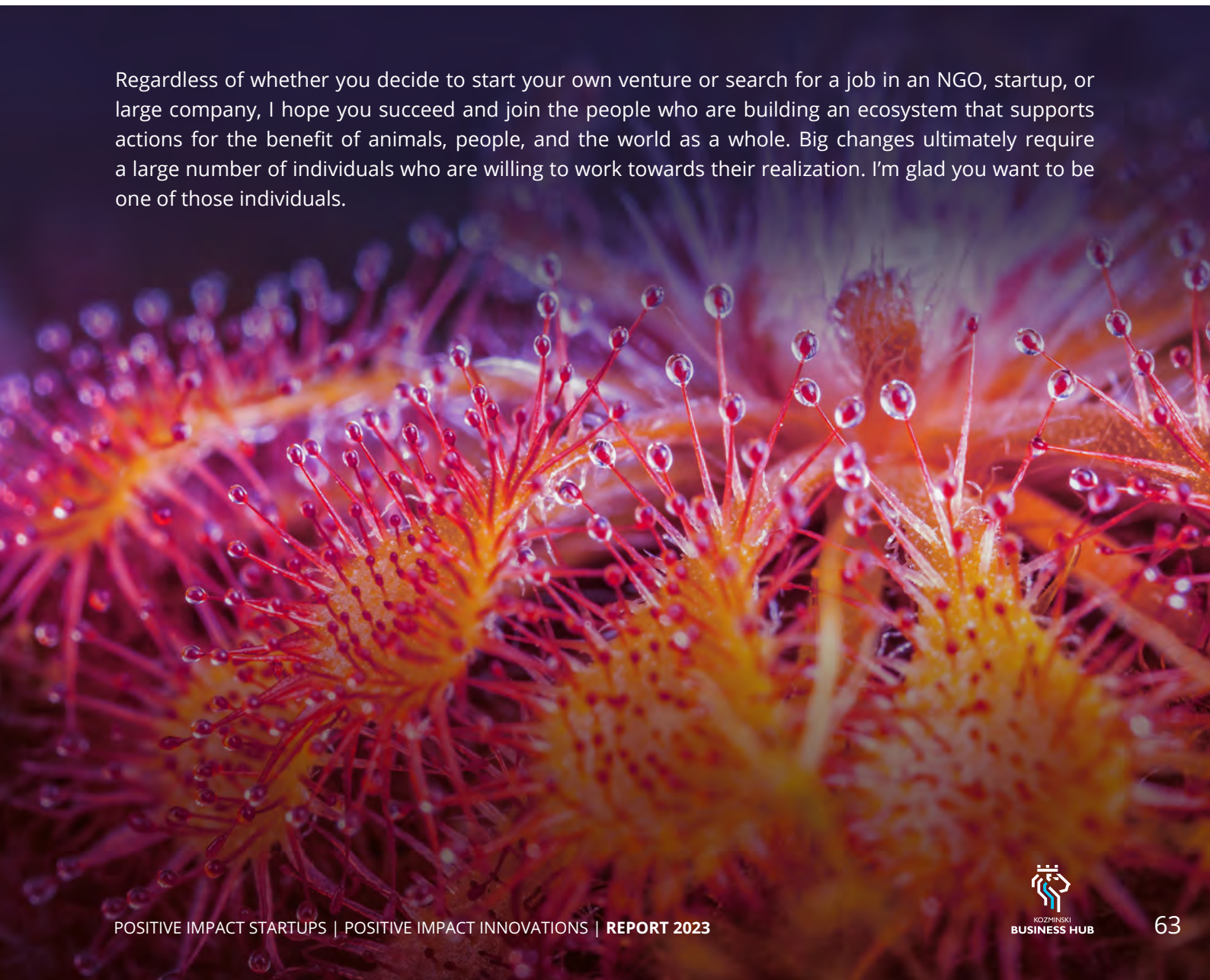
Become your own employer

It may happen that in the process of searching for a good job and defining actions that can have a positive impact on people and the Earth, you may find that you are unable to find a place that addresses the problem that resonates with you the most. It is worth considering starting your own organization or company. Such a step certainly requires a lot of courage and work, but it is worth honestly considering it. The world definitely needs more social entrepreneurs, and perhaps you can join this great group.

Remember that starting a project on your own does not mean that you cannot rely on the support of others. A big advantage of working in the field of ecological and social impact is that many people will be invested in your success. There are also organizations that help new projects that aim to make the world a better place, such as Impact Angels, Ashoka Foundation, or Foodtech.ac dedicated to projects related to sustainable food.

Running your own business is a big challenge, and it is certainly not a solution for everyone. At the same time, there are enough people who run their own companies and organizations, so there is no need to be too afraid of it. Entrepreneurs, including social entrepreneurs, are just ordinary people who make both good and bad decisions, and if they succeed in running their activities, there is no reason why you cannot succeed as well.

Regardless of whether you decide to start your own venture or search for a job in an NGO, startup, or large company, I hope you succeed and join the people who are building an ecosystem that supports actions for the benefit of animals, people, and the world as a whole. Big changes ultimately require a large number of individuals who are willing to work towards their realization. I'm glad you want to be one of those individuals.



3.

The role of business in supporting science education

Joanna Kalinowska

Development Director, Copernicus Science Center

Adapting education to the changing reality is one of the challenges of modern times. Governments, ministries, as well as teachers and parents, are wondering how best to help young people prepare for an uncertain future. As part of their strategic documents, the European Union has defined key competences, and the OECD has developed the Learning Compass 2030, aimed at identifying the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that learners need to realize their potential and contribute to the well-being of their communities and the planet. These competences and the way they are taught have become the subject of lively public debate in recent years, including in business circles.

Supplementing formal education with activities that support future competences is in the interest of businesses. It helps to educate more flexible, adaptable, and creative employees. As a result, support for science education, including activities related to STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics) and experiential learning, is increasingly becoming of interest to businesses. This applies to both core commercial activities and projects related to corporate social responsibility.

Science education as a product

For some time now, there has been a development of products and services related to science education. Large companies operating in the education sector consciously choose to expand their offerings. Distributors of teaching aids and textbooks such as Moje Bambino, Nowa Szkoła, Nowa Era, Novum, and WSiP are increasingly including such products in their offerings. This is excellent support for the formal education system – schools and kindergartens can enhance their STEAM resources through purchases from trusted partners. It is also a source of revenue for businesses, considering that there are over 20,000 schools in Poland.

A significant factor that has helped expand the range of offerings in recent years is the Ministry of Education and Science program called „Laboratories of the Future.” Its goal is to „support all primary schools in developing future competences in the fields of STEAM.” The program involves allocating over one billion Polish zlotys to schools throughout Poland for aids and activities in this area. The program was launched in 2021 and is scheduled to continue until June 2023. As part of the program, schools can make purchases to equip their STEAM spaces using non-repayable grants.

Not all product ideas are successful – some, although selling well, do not support science education. This primarily applies to electronic equipment, such as interactive boards or even 3D printers, which, without proper lesson scenarios and teacher training, do not provide real support for science education.

However, there are also good examples of utilizing this opportunity. Moje Bambino, one of the largest players in the educational aids market, is actively involved in developing high-quality school products. The company collaborates with the Copernicus Science Center as part of the Modular

Natural Science Workshops program. Through research and development work, Moje Bambino has invested in preparing sets of laboratory accessories that enable STEAM experiments, along with instructional materials for teachers.

In addition to the „Laboratories of the Future” program, the interest of parents in new forms of non-formal education also contributes to the growth of smaller companies in this industry. These companies usually emerge from the founders’ commitment to educational development, resulting in high-quality products and services.

Skriware, which has significantly expanded its reach over the past 5 years, is experimenting with smart utilization of 3D printers in education. BeCreo offers a wide range of ScottieGo products to schools and parents, which aid in learning programming. This product is also available in international markets. SmartBee, on the other hand, is a company that offers subscriptions to experiment kits for children and their parents, and it also has offerings for schools.

There are also many smaller companies that offer workshops and additional classes in programming or experimentation, supporting scientific education through their activities.

Science education in online tools

STEAM has also become a good medium for technology companies. The pandemic has familiarized us with online education, and companies involved in providing educational technology have engaged in developing new ideas in this area.

Giant companies try to deliver universal solutions based on their existing resources. Microsoft is developing the MakeCode platform, which facilitates coding learning. Both Microsoft and Google have developed courses and materials for teachers to assist in science education using web technologies.

However, it is interesting to note that despite the growth of the EdTech startup market and the emergence of highly successful companies providing tools supporting learning (such as Coursera, Chegg, Duolingo in the US, and European LTG), there are few that effectively support science education. Such companies are also lacking in Poland.

Perhaps developing a valuable tool to support STEAM learning is not profitable or the time for it has not yet come. However, it is worth fighting for, as according to the „EdTech and New Technologies in the Education Industry” report, the value of the entire e-learning market worldwide will reach \$325 billion by 2025.

This does not mean that companies in Poland, both small and large, are not interested in this sector. Companies associated with this industry are members of the Ed-Tech Poland association, which actively participates in activities to promote STEAM education.

Supporting science education as part of corporate policy

Many companies, both Polish and foreign, engage in initiatives supporting science education through sponsorship or grants. The challenges related to education for the future seem to be increasingly important for company boards in recent years. As a result, larger budgets are allocated to projects in this area.

A particular case in STEAM education is climate education, which is also seeing an increase in participation by companies in pro-social activities, particularly in preparation for ESG implementation. Corporate foundations are increasingly allocating

funds for activities related to future competences. Companies often implement projects associated with such activities and their direct outcomes as part of building their social engagement.

For many years, Orange, through its foundation, has been conducting projects related to science education. Programs like SuperCoders or #BrainStorm focus mainly on new technologies but are engaging, interactive, and popular in schools. Additionally, the foundation implements a support project for teachers seeking interesting teaching methods in the „Teacher of Tomorrow” program, carried out in collaboration with the Teacher’s Voice.

Samsung has developed the educational program „Solve for Tomorrow,” which is implemented worldwide. It has been active in Poland for two years, attracting participants from across the country, and serves as an excellent example of a smart project implemented by businesses. On their website, the company states: „Participants work on group projects within four challenges (...).

These activities follow the successive stages of the Design Thinking methodology: empathizing, problem diagnosis, idea generation, prototyping, and testing. During project implementation, they also learn the STEAM method, which involves undertaking activities that utilize at least two of the five scientific disciplines.”

Henkel, through its program called „Świat Młodych Badaczy” (Forshewelt), has its own international educational program in the field of STEAM. This initiative aims to teach third and fourth-grade children the basics of experimenting and drawing conclusions.

An interesting example is the mBank Foundation, which is entirely dedicated to mathematical education in Poland. The foundation carries out some activities independently and collaborates with excellent social partners such as the Center for Civic Education and the „School with Class” Foundation. The foundation also provides grants, such as the „Growing with Mathematics” program, which supports the mathematical education of the youngest students. In the last edition, the foundation supported 137 entities.

A similar case is the Adamed Foundation, which was created to support the development of talented youth and promote the exact and natural sciences. Its main program is Adamed SmartUp, which aims to popularize the exact and natural sciences among secondary school students in Poland and support the most talented young individuals in their scientific development.

As part of the SmartUp program, films related to the exact sciences, prepared by well-known science popularisers, are produced. Additionally, Adamed SmartUP Academy offers a series of free and open weekend workshops for young science enthusiasts aged 14-19, with over 1600 students participating since 2015.

Companies also sponsor initiatives related to science education. In Poland, Samsung, Polkomtel, E-on, BASF, Raytheon, Boeing, and Deloitte are among the regular sponsors of the Copernicus Science Centre. Social organizations dedicated to education are also supported by businesses. The „Zwolnieni z teorii” initiative, which encourages young people to take independent action and engage in interdisciplinary problem-solving for social issues, is supported by the ING Dzieciom Foundation, Allegro, BNP Paribas, Enea, and Google.

The presence of major brands in scientific education indicates cross-sector agreement on the social importance of this topic and is a significant element of change in this area.

Science education as a means of acquiring future employees

Large technology and science-related companies have been working with schools for many years in programs that promote the development of students' skills and assist in choosing future fields of study. This applies not only to vocational and secondary schools, but also to some remarkable examples of cooperation in the field of scientific education that cannot be underestimated.

Mechatronics, robotics, mechanical, and electrical companies support teacher training and provide interesting programs for students in technical and vocational education. Companies such as BASF, Cisco, Festo, Samsung, Gaz-System, Mercedes, and Toyota undertake such initiatives.

What's next

The engagement of businesses in activities related to scientific education is a crucial element of the „critical mass” needed to bring about lasting changes in teaching methods, which are now a necessity. Cross-sector collaboration and business pressure on decision-makers will be the key drivers of further changes in this area. The changing conditions around us, such as learning differently than in school or from books, will also influence the further development of strong relationships between business and scientific education. A valuable direction of development will be the smart utilization of these technologies in scientific education, hopefully resulting in a magnificent and highly developed Polish product in the field of EdTech as soon as possible.



4.

5 best social enterprises

that demonstrate the possibility of combining business with social impact

Julia Koczanowicz-Chondzyńska

President of the Social and Economic Initiatives Foundation

For over 30 years, the Social and Economic Initiatives Foundation has been supporting organizations that are transforming the labour market to be more inclusive. They create job opportunities for people in disadvantaged employment situations or who have been out of the labour market for a long time. Here are five enterprises that successfully combine business with positive impact.

G&G Ltd. is an authorized supplier of equipment for renewable energy production. They install and provide charging stations for electric vehicles and small electromobility devices such as wheelchairs, bicycles, and electric scooters. The company employs 16 people, including 12 individuals at risk of exclusion.

The marketing agency **"Leżę i Pracuję"** (I Lie and I Work) employs people with physical disabilities. The **"Leżę i Pracuję"** team consists of 14 individuals, including 8 with disabilities.

Each of them specializes in their respective fields, from graphic design and copywriting to social media activities.

The Vocational Activity Center of the Joy Association in Dębica operates in several service and production areas, including furniture manufacturing, gastronomy (cafe-patisserie and lunch bar), cleaning and renovation services, laundry services, artistic handicraft workshop, as well as two Occupational Therapy Workshops, a Social Cooperative, and a Kindergarten for children with special needs. They employ 222 people, the majority of whom have disabilities.

The Social Cooperative "Bajkolandia" from Leżajsk was founded by 5 unemployed individuals. They run two Children's Clubs, a School for Parents called **"Niewypalona mama"** (Unburnt Mom), a children's costume rental service, a Baby Academy, and the only Childbirth School in the district.

The war in Ukraine has forced many people to migrate and seek opportunities in the Polish labour market. One of the fastest-growing initiatives employing individuals from conflict-affected areas is the **Ukrainian-Polish Workers' Cooperative "Kooperatywa Razem"** – their street food "pierożki-lepioszki" is winning the hearts and stomachs of Warsaw residents.

As we can see, examples of social enterprises can be found in every industry. Their business activities are profitable, and their social impact is invaluable. Often, without such enterprises,

local communities would be deprived of essential services or opportunities for decent, legal, and fairly compensated work.

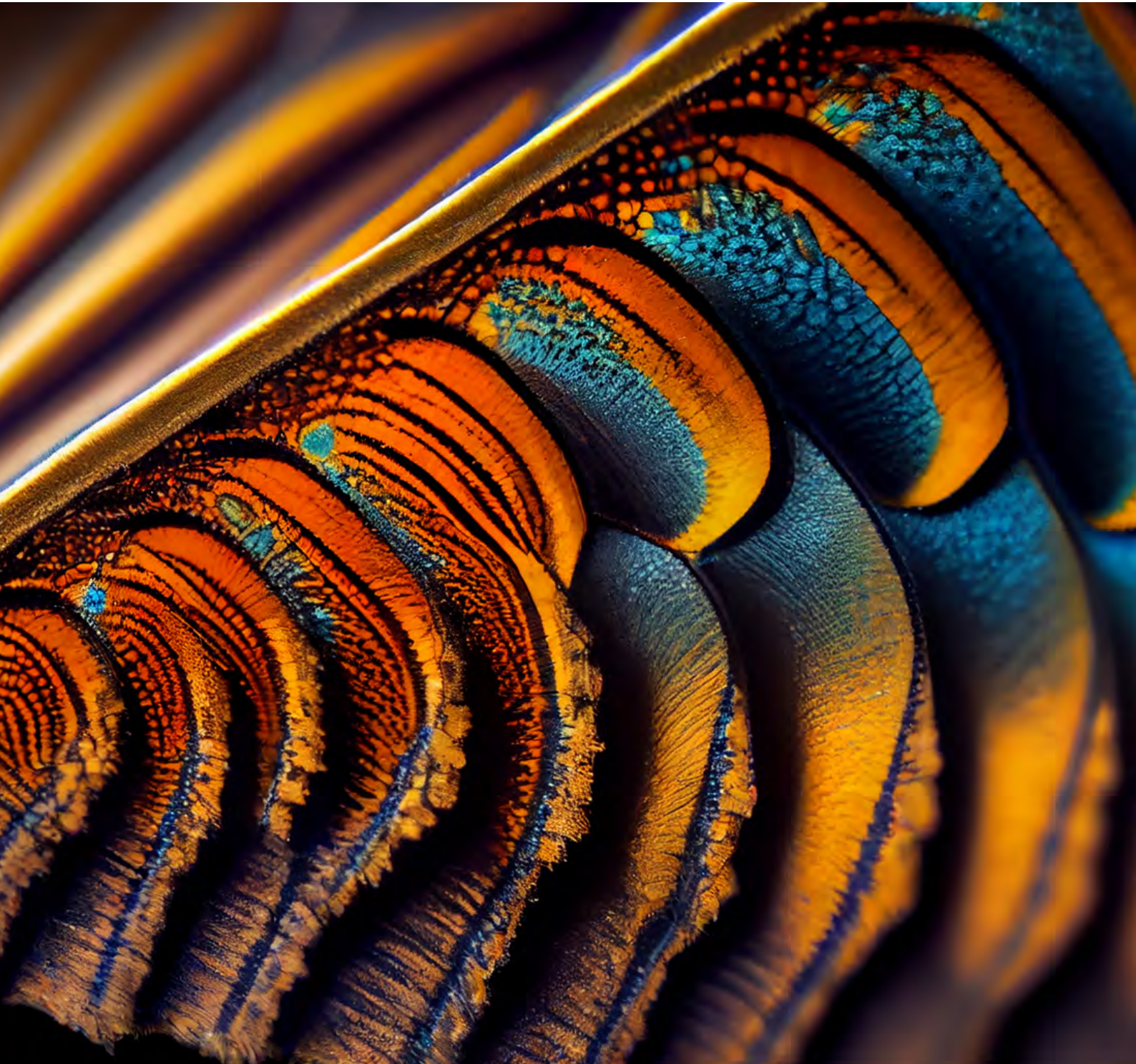
Get inspired at: ekonomiaspoleczna.pl

Get to know the participants of the J. Kuroń Social Enterprise of the Year Competition at: konkurs-es.pl



Part IV

The World of Challenges
and Opportunities



1.

5 skills important for every person starting a positive impact startup

Mirella Panek-Owsiańska

CSR and Diversity Management Expert

Since the beginning of the "Positive Impact Startups" project, to which I was invited by Prof. Bolesław Rok, we have been discussing how hybrid organizations can learn from both business and social organizations. It is valuable to take the best practices from both commercial and non-governmental sectors and create unique business models.

In this article, I propose 5 areas and skills that are useful for every entrepreneur thinking about creating or running their own positive impact startup. I also suggest where to learn these skills. Even if solutions found in other sectors may not be fully applicable to our own company/organization, they can serve as inspiration for creating and implementing new hybrid ideas.



Transparency

Transparency is widely discussed in the business world, and the EU has regulations in this direction as well. So how can we implement transparency in our own organization?

We can start with our wage policy and take inspiration from organizations like Watchdog Polska, which statutorily promotes transparency in public life. Internally, the organization has

developed a very transparent remuneration policy, publicly providing employee contracts and job descriptions.

Otwarte Klatki also publish their remuneration algorithm, and transparency is given a separate section on Akcja Demokracja website. Fashion brands like Elementy and Balagan, belonging to the Transparent Shopping Collective, can also inspire us by openly discussing the prices of their products, production, and the social initiatives they engage in.

Lastly, transparency is an important business element for the awarded positive impact startup Ubrania do oddania (Clothes to Donate) in 2020. They collect used clothing, and the donor can choose the organization to which the donation will be given, with the donation amount being

transparent. Genuine transparency can be a key value communicated by a startup, which influences management and communication. This attracts conscious customers and facilitates recruitment, especially among the younger generation.



Inclusivity

A diverse team and a truly inclusive policy can be key factors for success in a positive impact startup. One can explore companies that excel in this area through research by Forum Odpowiedzialnego Biznesu - Diversity in Check. Additionally, many specific cases of implementing DEI (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion) policies are shared by representatives of various companies in the "Sięgaj po więcej" podcast.

There are also numerous publications available in the market that help understand why diversity management is important from a business perspective and provide guidance on implementing best practices in one's own company or organization. If I had to recommend

just one, it would be the comprehensive guide: "Różnorodność i kultura włączająca krok po kroku. Praktyczny przewodnik dla organizacji" (Diversity and Inclusive Culture Step by Step: A Practical Guide for Organizations) edited by Divercity+.

Numerous NGOs focused on different areas of discrimination offer interesting collaboration proposals, such as architectural audits, website accessibility audits, implementation of parental directives, mentoring for women, creating a neurodiverse-friendly environment, LGBTQ+ inclusion, hiring migrants, and more. It is worth considering various forms of cooperation with anti-discrimination organizations, such as offering volunteer work, pay-roll collaboration, or joint social campaigns with elements of socially engaged marketing (i.e., donating a portion of the proceeds from a product or service to an organization).

Often, positive impact startups and social organizations share the same values, so it is worth considering the synergy of their actions, especially since there are numerous ways and tools to facilitate the inclusion of all employees.

In some cases, inclusivity becomes a founding idea, as in the case of the award-winning startup Leżę i pracuję (I lie and I work) - a marketing agency created to provide job opportunities for people with mobility disabilities. Inclusivity can

also be part of social engagement, as seen in the #OkresWypada (#PeriodIsNatural) campaign initiated by the positive impact startup Your Kaya in 2020.

Networking

When operating at the intersection of sectors, contacts become crucial in the development of a startup. Founders of positive impact startups should be able to establish and nurture relationships with other organizations, investors, experts, and local communities. Building partnerships is not only beneficial for business growth but also enables the exchange of knowledge, experiences, and resources, increasing the chances of success in solving social and environmental problems.

Understanding the ecosystem, including individuals, institutions, organizations, accelerators, or conferences worth attending, is useful. On the business side, it may include venture capital funds or investors, especially those with an understanding of impact investing, such as Impact

Angels - a club of business angels changing the world for the better. On the social side, there are many EU programs, social innovation incubators, support programs for social enterprises and their founders, such as Ashoka Poland.

Not all proposals may be applicable, but it is worth knowing about them and trying to find initiatives that best suit the nature of one's activities. Being a member of the changemaker community provides not only inspiration and connections but also an understanding of the dynamics of positive impact startup development and finding supportive individuals who can uplift spirits during the toughest moments, which is as important as raising capital.

Methodology knowledge

Knowledge of methodologies that support management and planning, as well as the ability to apply them to solve social problems, can be a key skill for the founder of a startup.

Strategic thinking involves the ability to look into the future, engage in long-term planning, and make strategic decisions. Founders of positive impact startups must understand the complexity

of social and environmental issues and be able to develop a clear action strategy that considers their goals, values, and scope of impact.

One useful methodology to explore is foresight. Foresight is a set of tools that facilitate the construction of scenarios for future developments (usually 10-20 years ahead) or in cases where there may be difficult-to-predict developments. The Stocznia Foundation, for example, utilized foresight methodology as part of the Civic Foresight project.

Moreover, learning how to apply design thinking methodologies to solve social problems is possible through various online courses like "Design Thinking for Good" offered on platforms

like Coursera, edX, or FutureLearn. Prototyping social services is a crucial element in many social innovation projects that apply to social innovation incubators.

Creativity

Creativity is an essential skill for those starting positive impact startups. Striving for innovative solutions, thinking outside the box, and the ability to combine different fields are crucial for effectively solving social and environmental problems. Creativity enables the creation of innovative products, services, and business models that have the potential for positive impact.

One can learn or enhance creativity by being open to diverse perspectives and ideas, such as creating a team with diverse composition, skills, and perspectives. The work environment becomes important, where people feel comfortable and are

encouraged to share ideas, which can significantly contribute to generating innovative solutions. Hence, the popularity of coworking spaces and collaborations utilized by many startups.

Creativity often stems from experimentation and trying new things. Positive impact startups should foster a culture that promotes experimentation and accepts the possibility of making mistakes. Trying new solutions, testing different strategies, and learning from experiences can lead to the discovery of innovative and effective problem-solving methods.

Founding a positive impact startup is an exciting and ambitious entrepreneurial journey. To achieve success, certain key skills are essential. Transparency, inclusivity, knowledge of diverse methodologies, networking skills, and creativity are indispensable for effectively creating innovative solutions that will have a positive impact on society and the environment. The combination of these skills allows for the development of a values-based business that contributes to creating a better future for all of us.



2.

Can the success of an impact startup be measured differently than by profit?

Dominika Lenkowska-Piechocka

Who Will Save The Planet

I could start this text with "Dear Diary" because it contains so many personal experiences and observations from the lives of my colleagues in the world of young businesses. It reflects the experiences of someone who, for nearly 3 years, has been navigating between two worlds: corporations flirting more or less with sustainable development and positive impact startups. It comes from someone with achievements, tremendous enthusiasm, but also occasional frustration.

Having my own business has been the best time in my professional career. It's a time of spreading wings and taking a big breath after working for many years in large organizations with never-ending decision-making processes. Creating a company that exclusively undertakes projects aligned with sustainable development gives a sense of agency that compensates for the challenges of running your own business. However, running an impact startup also involves a lot of calculations and weighing between one's well-being and the well-being of the world. It means collaborating with inspiring individuals who are motivated to steer their organizations toward more sustainable paths, but also encountering the world of "business as usual," just dressed up in the colours of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

In this text, I have collected several reflections that have accompanied me for so long that I can no longer keep them to myself. I release them into the world, hoping they will reach the right people

and stimulate their thinking. I would like to write "Any resemblance to real characters and events is purely coincidental," but that would be a lie. :)

The pressure of scalability and continuous growth

Motivation for starting an impact startup can vary. Sometimes it happens incidentally, as a savvy owner connects the dots and realizes that their business can have a positive impact. Having an impact-oriented founding myth certainly increases the chances of success. Cheers to that! However, what resonates with me the most is the motivation associated with a genuine desire to change the world for the better. Who Will Save The Planet emerged from fear of climate change and the world my children would inherit. Fortunately, I have the talent to turn fear into action.

Today, Who Will Save The Planet generates stable and satisfying profits while undertaking valuable projects, but it has no intention of growing. The concept of a boutique ESG advisory firm is good enough for me, and I see no need to expand it into a networked consultancy or increase revenue

by adding more zeros. This consciously limited scale of operations ensures staying in close relationship with the product, maintaining quality, and upholding the values that Who Will Save The Planet stands for. It is also an expression of care for my own mental well-being.

At the same time, I constantly encounter the pressure of scalability and growth, the multiplication of profits, and the pursuit of a growth model based on "more money." It can be quite exhausting because it turns out that even in the world of impact startups, the potential for development is perceived not in terms of the value that the activity can bring to stakeholders, including the environment, but primarily in terms of the money that can be earned.

Here's a small digression. It doesn't matter that GDP has been criticized as a measure of economic health and social well-being for decades. A metric based on money overlooks the impending climate catastrophe, air quality, social bonds, healthcare, education, or the psychological well-being of the inhabitants of a given country. That's why alternative indicators are becoming increasingly popular, although still insufficient. Examples include the Human Development Index, Better Life Index, Gross National Happiness, or the Polish Responsible Development Index.

However, despite its flaws, GDP is still the most popular indicator. We are hostages to growth based on GDP, which is measured by consumption. Just as politicians succumb to the pressure of society, which they partly create themselves,

to maintain GDP growth, creators of positive impact startups are under pressure from investors who, simplifying it, primarily calculate their support based on scalability potential and return on investment measured in monetary terms.

For clarity, I am not surprised that someone investing money expects a solid profit – that’s the dominant economic model. Furthermore, I am pleased that an increasing stream of money is gradually being redirected towards positive impact startups, partly due to emerging legal regulations. However, I have doubts about how this standard approach will affect the original motivations of impact startup founders. How, under the pressure of development understood as profit-generated growth, will the core values of these entities change? Shouldn’t positive impact startups, as organizations that aim to break old patterns and support the transformation of the economy towards a sustainable model, be primarily evaluated based on the non-financial value they bring? Especially during grant competitions organized by large institutions that explicitly promote the Sustainable Development Goals, such as sustainable consumption.

Grant competitions where marketing matters more than impact

Probably due to my long years in a PR agency, I generally have a negative opinion of competitions and rankings. Of course, there are exceptions, but a large portion of events focused on awarding prizes to companies involves fees paid in more or less transparent ways. Sometimes it’s different, for example, in the case of grant competitions for startups organized by large commercially operating institutions. Here, the “fee” is often counted as the marketing effect that the winning startup can bring to the organizers. After all, when an institution allocates specific funds for grants, even if it falls under the umbrella of ESG activities and support for sustainable development, it must also have a business justification.

I understand this state of affairs, but I would like it to be transparent. Unfortunately, I have the impression that even the sponsors of many grant competitions for positive impact startups have not come to terms with the fact that these activities are primarily the result of their marketing strategy and not deep awareness among the management about the ecological disasters caused by overconsumption and waste. If it were different,

there would be no plastic confetti at the awards ceremony, and the jury members would not express disgust during public question sessions with the finalists about the idea of one startup that based its business model on reintroducing used building materials and interior furnishings into circulation because “who would want used furniture in their homes?” (sic!).



The relationship between corporations and positive impact startups - "it's complicated"

No matter what we say about corporations, they have a significant role to play, and without their support, many positive impact startups would not be able to get off the ground. Building Who Will Save The Planet myself, without the commissions and trust of larger players, I would not be where I am now. And for that trust, I am immensely grateful. However, I have the impression that support from corporations for startups primarily occurs when the associated risks are minimal or non-existent. Everyone looks after their own interests.

However, while observing and talking to creators of impact startups, I have often encountered the opinion that instead of the opportunity to participate in a "startup beauty contest" and the potential grant on the horizon, they would prefer real contracts from corporations.

Unfortunately, those contracts do not appear, and along with the rejection comes the message "test it with someone, if it works, we'll support you." And so the startup will go from door to door, facing rejection, albeit disguised with promises of future collaboration.

It may also happen that an impact startup keeps receiving more and more awards, sustaining itself with those funds, but instead of using its energy to develop its core business, it exhausts its resources in competing for the attention of competition juries. It lives from grant to grant. And as long as it is not working on costly technology, it needs real contracts and the opportunity to participate in pilot programs more than a few tens of thousands of dollars. Fortunately, there are more such forms of support emerging in the market.

It is worth noting the globally prevailing crisis of trust. As the Edelman Trust Barometer 2023 shows, for the third year in a row, business is perceived as the only competent and ethically operating institution. However, this does not mean that businesses can rest on their laurels; despite the trust they have, society expects them to engage even more in global challenges, such as combating social inequalities and climate change, or enabling access to healthcare. This engagement may involve greater collaboration with impact startups. Even if it would be more convenient to opt for a safe service or product from another major organization with which the startup wants to compete. I'm familiar with this situation firsthand when I heard from a colleague, "We would take you, but we need a big brand here to have a front." I'm not offended by reality, but I call things by their names.

CSRD - a game-changer for impact startups?

We know that we need systemic changes and a rethinking of the dominant economic model. Many legal regulations supporting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda are being introduced to change our world to a more sustainable one. Unfortunately, transforming the entire system is time-consuming, and the situation requires change here and now. Shifting large organizations onto sustainable tracks is a process that requires going through agony. It means overturning the status quo that they owe their size to. Such a metamorphosis must be difficult to carry out for many reasons.

In this context, the value that positive impact startups have to offer to big business and the economy is invaluable. Considering the strong ESG trend, everything indicates that these are ideal times for impact startups. Agile organizations driven by the desire to change the world for the

better can be important partners for corporations in implementing many projects. While the CSRD directive will not directly affect startups in most cases, those that effectively report their ESG results and can demonstrate positive impact can attract larger investments and market interest.

In conclusion, I return to the question I posed in the title of the text - Can the success of an impact startup be measured differently than by profit? Measuring the success of an impact startup must be more comprehensive than traditional financial metrics. Of course, profit is an important indicator because it enables the company to continue its operations and scale its impact.

However, especially during grant competitions, we must emphasize other aspects that reflect the positive social and environmental changes generated by the startup. But to assess that, we need to ensure the right mindset among the jury members. Systemic transformation starts in the minds of those managing corporations. I feel that the most significant work lies in raising the awareness of those in managerial positions. Otherwise, the change will only be superficial, remaining at the level of image change. And that's not the point.

3.

Impact startups? Let's check!

With **Martyna Zastawna, Zofia Zochniak, Elżbieta Opiła**, and **Adrian Piwko** interviewed by **Klementyna Sęga**, communication expert, ESG & CSR

Year after year, the number of companies joining the group of businesses that are not the best in the world but the best for the world is growing. This publication is evidence of the increasing number of impact startups—a fifth edition report containing a growing database of various organizations whose goal is to change our reality into a slightly better version.

Better or worse

The startups that are noticed and recognized are innovative initiatives that do a lot of good and often change the rules of the game in their industries. This recognition adds faith in the meaningfulness of the actions for the teams behind the awarded initiatives. It helps increase visibility and even attract new business partnerships.

However, entrepreneurs face many challenges in their everyday lives. They must meet these challenges to ensure profitability, attract investors, and stay in the market. The received awards are forgotten, the galas where the accolades are given quickly come to an end, and the struggle for survival continues. And when reality says,

"I'm checking," it's just like in poker—sometimes it goes better, sometimes worse. While some are on the rise, and their LinkedIn profiles flourish with posts about successes, others struggle to stay afloat, scaling down their business operations, and still others are forced to cease their activities.

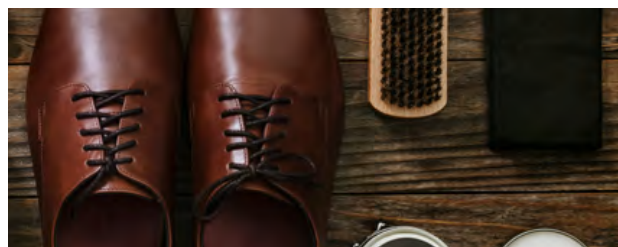
Even if we closely monitor the market, it is sometimes challenging to keep up with the fast pace of events in the startup world. That's why I asked several laureates from previous years' Impact Startup Report about their current status. Are you curious about how the previously recognized startups are doing?

Let's check!

LAUREATE IN 2018
How is **woshwosh** doing?

woshwosh is the world's first company dedicated to cleaning, repairing, and renovating footwear. It was founded in 2015 when its founder, Martyna Zastawna, started looking for a way to extend the life of her favourite pair of shoes and couldn't find any company in Poland providing such services. She decided to start one herself. The beginnings were difficult, but today, when asked about how woshwosh is doing, she responds from Washington, as one of the 15 women worldwide selected by the US Department of State for the prestigious Fortune Most Powerful Women mentoring program.

What has changed since being recognized in the Impact Startup Report in 2018?



Martyna Zastawna, CEO of woshwosh: Practically everything, except our values! :) Today, we are a much larger company, more digitized, and we successfully develop both B2C and B2B channels, not only in Poland. The last few years have been challenging but very fruitful for us.



Our biggest success so far is...

MZ: I believe that our biggest success is still ahead of us. However, if I had to choose now, it would definitely be creating a zero-waste trend in Poland and saving over half a million pairs of shoes from being discarded. It's also our social impact, which involves collecting and donating over 180,000 pairs of shoes to those in need.

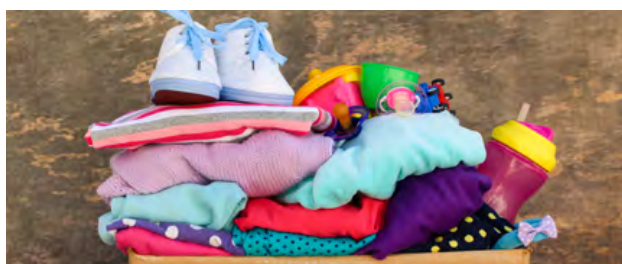
Our biggest failure is...



MZ: Our biggest failure, which was the first few months of woshwosh's existence, is also our success. Without that very difficult time at the beginning, I wouldn't have had the knowledge, patience, and perseverance to develop the company in subsequent years.

LAUREATE IN 2020
How is **Ubrania do Oddania** doing?

Ubrania do Oddania was founded in 2018 by Zosia Zochniak and Tomek Bocian as a fundraising platform that connects used clothing collections with charitable support for NGOs in Poland. Today, it has become almost a movement for the second-hand market! Over the past 5 years, Ubrania do Oddania has managed to donate over one million zlotys to those in need, encouraged thousands of people to practice responsible management of unwanted clothing, and promoted the purchase of second-hand items. A groundbreaking move for UDO's recognition was the opening of Circular Boutiques in shopping centres throughout Poland, introducing second-hand clothing among the shiny stores of major clothing chains.



What has changed since being recognized in the Impact Startup Report in 2020?

Zofia Zochniak, co-founder of UDO: We have increased our operational efficiency by 40%, which has significantly contributed to our revenue growth. Our team has surpassed 100 employees, and we have joined the group of experts in the UN Global Compact, the initiative of the UN Secretary-General within the European Union's Strategy for Sustainable and Circular Textiles. We have also formed a partnership with the European Commission to implement the strategy's principles in Poland.

Our biggest success so far is...



ZZ: Receiving the title of Socially Responsible Company of the Year 2022 according to Forbes magazine and developing and implementing the "Let's circle together" strategy, which involves reintroducing used clothing into the sales salons of the 4F brand.



Our biggest failure is...

ZZ: Incompetent and irresponsible recruitment approaches, which often put our projects back to the same starting point multiple times.

LAUREATE IN 2018

Where is **Kosmos dla Dziewczynek**?

Kosmos dla dziewczynek is a foundation, the first of its kind in Poland, dedicated to everything encompassing „girlhood” and a non-fiction magazine. The magazine has already published 34 issues and is distributed throughout Poland, with its readership—both girls and others—continuing to grow. Since the foundation’s establishment in 2017, 100,000 children, along with 2,500 teachers, have participated in the foundation’s workshops, which empower young individuals in discovering their talents and strengths, providing them with a new perspective independent of the outdated grading system and the foundations of the education system. The foundation tirelessly works towards a world without divisions and a better future for women in Poland, primarily by instilling self-belief and courage in them to be themselves. Because girls have power!

What has changed since being recognized in the Impact Startup Report in 2018?



Elżbieta Opiła, President of the Board: The Kosmos dla Dziewczynek foundation consistently expands its scope of influence. Through our workshops, 100,000 children have learned about the Polish women scientists, artists, and explorers who have made an impact on the world. We have also launched a portal for adults, providing expert and important content for parents and educators to support them in creating a world free from stereotypes. We organized the first scientific conference in Poland about girls and girlhood, inspiring researchers to conduct reliable girlhood studies rather than relying on adults’ assumptions about children. We involve girls themselves in the discussion about their own experiences, and we will continue to develop this path because they should have a voice.

With determination, we empower girls to become who they want to be, and we engage the whole world to make it possible.



Success means to us...

EO: Success for us is the social and practical response to our actions, especially from the girls themselves. In our message to the magazine’s readers, we wrote: “The future belongs to you, girls!” And our girls responded by expressing their belief in this future. One of them wrote in an email that it’s perfect timing because she plans to become a president! Another reader wrote, “I used to think it was wrong to be different from everyone else. Since I started reading Kosmos..., I have gained more confidence and realized that I don’t have to change for others because life is about everyone being different.”

What disappointed us the most...?



EO: Nothing really disappoints us, at most it can be challenging! And if there is anything, it would be the lack of understanding from the official education and culture system regarding how important the Kosmos dla Dziewczynek magazine is for the future of children and women. Despite public declarations, unfortunately, we did not receive a grant from the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage for printing the magazine, even though we had received regular funding for the past 3 years. Our magazine does not feature advertisements, and the economic crisis has caused a 200% increase in paper prices. That's a challenge. But on paper, wonderfully scented with high-quality journalism, we will remain!



LAUREATE IN 2020

And what about **Pora na Pola**?

Pora na Pola Pora na Pola is an online marketplace for local food. It aimed to help consumers make better choices for themselves and the environment. Over time, it became apparent that supporting consumers also meant supporting local farmers and artisans, preserving traditional varieties of vegetables and fruits, shortening the supply chain, and reducing the carbon footprint. The Pora na Pola.pl platform was created in 2019 and has enabled over 100 local producers to reach 10,000 customers. The startup has been noticed by government institutions such as the National Support Centre for Agriculture, participated in accelerator programs like NESsT and IKEA Social Entrepreneurship, and received recognition from Kozminski Business Hub and the Brief magazine in the ranking of the 50 Most Creative Businesses. In 2022, it was nominated for the Startup of the Year award by money.pl and received an award in the "Best in CSR" category at the e-Commerce Polska Awards. So why did Pora na Pola declare bankruptcy at the beginning of 2023?



Your startup achieved great success in its first two years of existence. Did you imagine such a high interest in an online marketplace for local food?

Adrian Piwko, Founder and CEO of Pora na Pola: The vision for Pora na Pola emerged back in 2016 from the need to know what I eat. I wanted to make conscious choices and decided to provide that opportunity to other consumers as well. Initially, the project developed as a sole proprietorship, serving Warsaw and its surroundings. At that time, the e-commerce market was gaining momentum, but the e-grocery segment practically did not exist. I registered the company in early 2019, and by then, we already had dozens of trusted suppliers and a community gathered around good food. The potential for scaling the project was already visible.

We achieved above-average growth from 2019 to 2021 and gained significant publicity, resulting in the fulfilment of 25,000 orders for local products. The pandemic demystified e-grocery, opened consumers to online food shopping, and gave us a strong impetus to implement innovative projects that aligned with our mission, supported scaling, and aimed to increase business efficiency once we reached the anticipated scale based on very optimistic expert forecasts.

So the pandemic accelerated development both positive trends and conscious consumption or greater self-interest health and the conditions under which it is produced food?



AP: The pace of the company's growth, brand popularity, customer base, order volume, and support from experts and investors exceeded our expectations at one point. The e-grocery market was still a small part of e-commerce, but it was gaining traction. In 2021, everything indicated that consumer changes towards conscious consumption, local patriotism, convenience of food shopping online, and willingness to pay more for quality would be long-lasting.



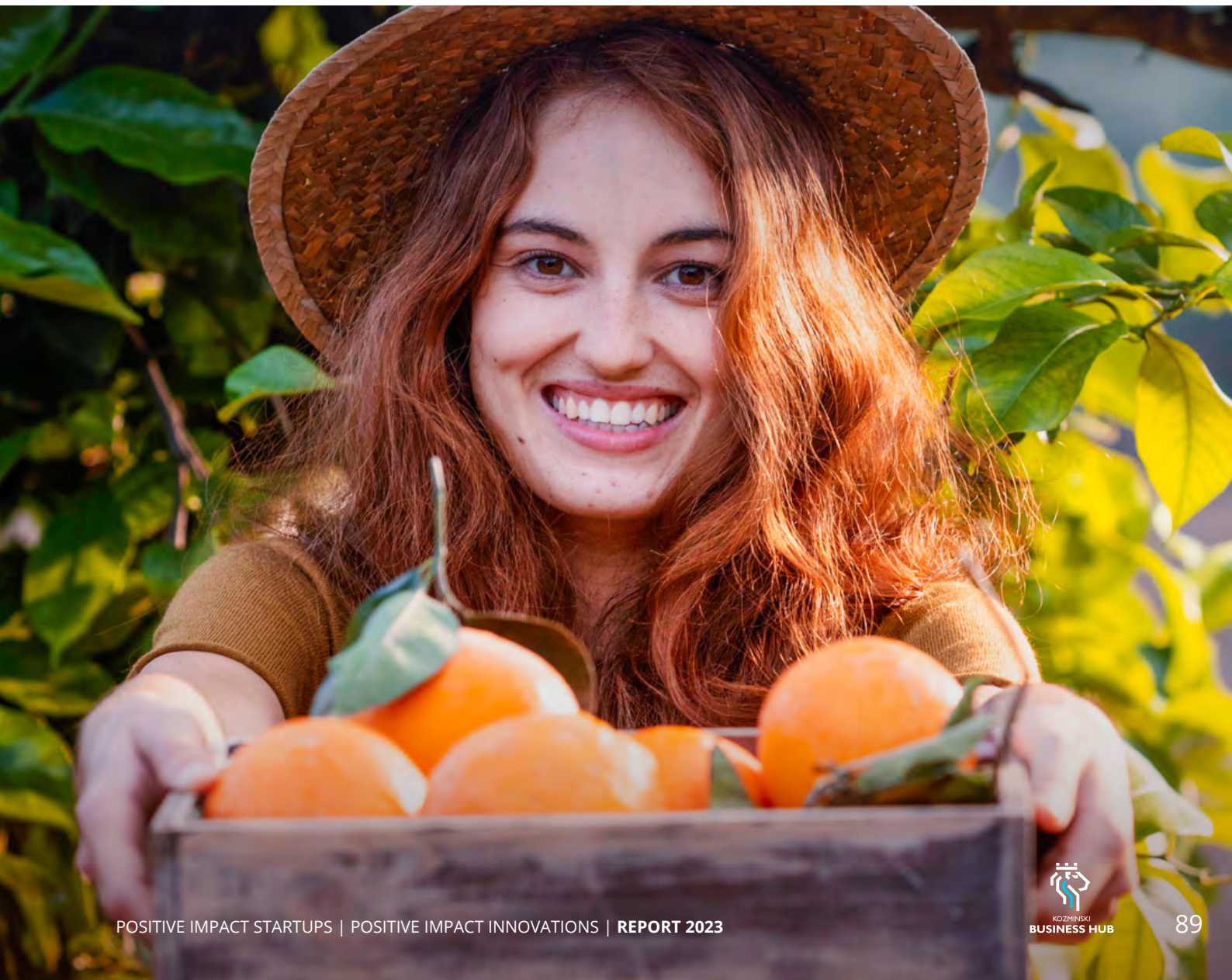
However, the trend started to reverse, and after returning to "normal," we quickly returned to our old habits of visiting supermarkets. Why did this happen?

AP: Unfortunately, like many other businesses and experts, we underestimated the sustainability of these trends post-pandemic. Polish consumers returned to shopping in physical stores and shopping malls after the lockdown. From 2022 onwards, several unfavourable factors began to impact our situation: economic slowdown, war in Ukraine, energy crisis, dramatic inflation increase, and a decline in the living standards of Poles. As a result of these changes, consumers started scrutinizing every spent zloty and reducing expenses on food, which particularly affected the consumption of more expensive organic and artisanal products and a return to "lower-quality ingredients." The unfavourable situation hit the consumers we target with our service the hardest: the middle class, from large cities, young families with mortgages for new apartments or houses.

As a result, you had to suspend Pora na Pola's operations. Do you plan to continue your mission, support small producers, and facilitate access to healthy food in a different, new form?



AP: I am certain that the initiative of culinary patriotism, supporting small farmers, and facilitating access to healthy, high-quality food is needed. After the economic crisis, there would be significant justification for continuing the project. The experience gained from Pora na Pola allowed us to draw certain conclusions, such as being more cautious in relying on current trends that may turn out to be short-lived and considering changes in the geopolitical situation. I will certainly apply these insights in the future, including the further development of the global wholesale agricultural exchange - DeFood. In this project, we see an opportunity to support producers and facilitate access to healthy food at the B2B level. At the same time, I am open to further work that realizes the mission of Pora na Pola based on our experiences, even in these challenging times. I hope that someone will successfully scale a business based on trading local, organic food, and I will strongly support them in doing so.



4.

What do competitions and accelerators give to startups?

Michał Kruszyński

Znika

The Polish startup ecosystem is still young and developing rapidly. From the perspective of a new startup, one can see that despite the limited number of initiatives such as competitions, grants, or subsidies, the situation is changing for the better. Fortunately, Poland is starting to recognize the enormous potential hidden within startups, especially in the technology sector.

However, it's important to realize that competition during these competitions is relatively high. Many promising startups participate in a limited number of competitions, which requires even greater commitment and effort from the participants. On the other hand, despite the significant competition, I can confidently say that I have never encountered a more positive and supportive environment. Even though startups compete on stage, they often collaborate and support each other outside of it, working together to make the world a better place.

Our experience with competitions at Znika

The history of our startup, Znika, is proof that participating in competitions can bring many benefits. Both myself and my partner, Paulina Pepera, had years of experience in public speaking, which turned out to be a significant advantage. The ability to effectively tell the story of our project and having confidence on stage gave us an edge. Additionally, the fact that Znika is an environmentally friendly startup fighting the problem of plastic attracted people who wanted to help. After all, nobody likes plastic.

Thanks to these factors, we managed to win awards and distinctions. Initially, we won the "Szkoła Pionierów" (School of Pioneers) acceleration program by the Polish Development Fund and Allegro, which brought us the main prize of PLN 50,000.

This win was incredibly important for us because it not only provided us with funds for the basic validation of our ideas but also brought us publicity and caught the attention of the top venture capital funds in Poland.

Other successes include winning the Impact Arena at ImpactCEE in Poznań, where we received the main prize worth EUR 10,000, as well as being recognized as a positive impact startup in the "Startupy Pozytywnego Wpływu" (Positive Impact Startups) report by the Kozminski University. Both of these successes helped us gain visibility and provided additional expert support.

Additionally, we secured second place in the ING Bank technology competition, which brought us the main prize of PLN 300,000. This was a breakthrough award for us as it is one of

the most prestigious competitions in Europe. Such financial support for a project, without any equity obligations (so-called equity-free), is unprecedented.

We have also participated in acceleration programs such as Warsaw Booster and currently BioEconomy Ventures, where we learn from experts about developing a startup from both business and technological perspectives.

We also reached the semi-finals of the Huawei Startup Challenge, and currently, we are in the semi-finals of this year's InfoShare. Our active participation in competitions stems from the belief

that they provide an excellent path for promoting the startup, acquiring additional capital, and forming partnerships.

What do participation in competitions and accelerators provide?

Participating in competitions and accelerators has given us many benefits. Firstly, it allows us to gain valuable know-how about the market, startups, negotiating with venture capital funds, market-fit products, international expansion, and many other topics that are essential for effectively running a company.

Additionally, we establish connections with mentors and organizers who are always willing to provide assistance. Our experience shows that simply asking for support often leads to arranging a short phone conversation where we can discuss

current challenges and receive valuable insights. It's an incredible feeling to be able to call someone with 30 years of experience in a particular segment and challenge our ideas.

Competitions have allowed us to establish contact with other fantastic startups, which often leads to interesting partnerships. Thanks to our participation in the School of Pioneers program by the Polish Development Fund and Allegro, we maintain excellent relationships with the Polish Development Fund, Allegro, the entire Foodtech.ac ecosystem, and through various joint competitions, we collaborate with startups like Swapp! or Ety on a business level.

Accelerators and competitions have also been an excellent opportunity to validate our ideas and share them with experienced experts. Often, we thought that a particular solution made

sense in theory, but during classes and meetings, we could revise our ideas before implementing them in the market, which probably saved us a lot of stress, time, and resources.

What does winning a competition provide?

Winning a competition brings immense value to a startup. Everyone likes it when someone recognizes our efforts and tries to help us. Walking off the stage with a check handed to us by market experts is an incredible experience and a significant motivation to continue our work.

Such a win brings recognition and social legitimacy. Every young startup is initially unknown in the market, and building a brand and gaining trust from customers and partners is challenging. However, when competent juries choose us as winners of a prestigious competition,

we automatically gain greater respect from industry professionals, and concerns about collaboration become much smaller. Conversations with partners are completely different when we are supported by so many independent individuals and competitions.

Additionally, each win is usually accompanied by sponsored interviews and naturally arising interviews driven by journalists' curiosity. Thanks to this, Znika has appeared in places such as Puls Biznesu, Money.pl, Business Insider, Mam Startup, Teraz Środowisko, Świat OZE, Dlahandlu.pl, and many others. It's in these places where we could talk about our compostable packaging and other packaging solutions.

Winning also translates into acquiring funds for further development. In the case of Znika, we won a total of prizes worth approximately PLN 400,000, which provides a significant capital injection. This amount greatly helped us in the challenging year of 2023 for everyone.

With the financial resources, we gained greater freedom and the ability to make riskier decisions. Now, we can focus on completing our research and development work without worrying about lacking funds at the final stretch. The winnings also allowed us to extend the period of operations without generating income, providing me and

Paulina with greater stability and reducing stress associated with a tight schedule. Fortunately, Znika already has customers, and its revenue increases every month. However, the awareness that if the current concept didn't work out, we still have room for changes and improvements was also helpful.

The cost of acquiring our first customers was much higher than it is now, so the additional financial resources helped us minimize that cost and accelerate the scaling of our business. It often happened that after a competition, several potential customers reached out to us, and in the beginning, they were worth their weight in gold, allowing us to validate our ideas in the market. This means that the competition didn't just validate us in theory but allowed us to confront the market in practice.

The future of Znika after competitions

After successful participation in competitions, we are now working intensively to maintain and leverage the trust we have gained as a young startup. We focus on establishing strategic partnerships that will enable our further development. Our offering is constantly expanding with new eco-friendly packaging and labelling solutions to meet the growing demand for sustainable solutions in the sector. We receive inquiries from increasingly larger clients, both from innovative and eco-conscious companies, as well as traditional industries. An example of this is our recent partnership with the Warta Poznań football club, which shows that our solutions are attractive to a wide range of economic sectors.

With the support of our partners, clients, and project enthusiasts, we hope to achieve further growth milestones and contribute to positive changes for the environment. We thank everyone

for their support so far and encourage you to follow our journey. Together, as a community of startups and innovative enterprises, we can make a positive impact in the world.

We invite all companies that would like to switch to more eco-friendly packaging and labelling to contact us, and we encourage all Polish startups to participate in competitions!



Część V

The World of Conversations around Positive Impact Innovation



1.



Envirly

Managing Organizational Carbon Footprint

“ESG is not just a proverbial stick, but also a carrot”

Anna Kula in conversation with **Weronika Czaplewska**
- Vice President of Envirly who believes that entrepreneurship is a good and effective way to act for the planet.

Envirly is a startup that boldly entered the Polish market and quickly became a partner for businesses in reducing CO₂ emissions. The brand was established at the end of 2021 and already has nearly 200 clients, constantly creating new products not only in the environmental impact area but also in the social sphere. Envirly has also won several awards, including the Innovation Eagle of Rzeczpospolita 2022.

What is Envirly?



It is a solution that supports the sustainable development of organizations. We help companies with everything related to the broad concept of ESG, both in managing the carbon footprint of the company itself, its products, or events, as well as in the area of social impact.

Our solution takes the form of a web platform. We calculate the carbon footprint there, which, in the context of upcoming reporting obligations, is the most important and urgent issue for our clients. However, we constantly enrich Envirly with additional aspects, including social ones. Initially, it is more consultative, to understand the market, talk to the client, and learn about their needs. Then, we create scalable and repeatable solutions, transfer them to the platform, and provide them in the form of ready-made modules.



What type of clients do you target with your services?

We target business clients. We are open to every sector and company size. However, we have noticed that the majority in our portfolio represents the light industry.



What impact does your company have, and how do you measure it? And is impact an important word that comes up in your conversations?

We calculate our own carbon footprint and take actions in that area, even though our company is not directly subject to CSRD reporting. But we don't want to be like a shoemaker without shoes. Moreover, the companies we collaborate with also pay attention to whether we have ESG policies.

When it comes to our impact on clients, we can measure it in two dimensions: quantitatively and qualitatively. The quantitative aspect is quite well quantified for us. We operate with multiple metrics that allow us to assess what is happening with the client. Whether they are reducing their carbon footprint or improving social indicators. Of course, this applies to clients who are willing to share their results, as it is not mandatory. And indeed, we observe that our clients are reducing their negative impact. It is something real, measurable, and visible.

The question naturally arises as to what contribution our tool had to these results. The client probably had a renewable energy transition policy before, and in our platform, it is simply visible that they are implementing it. However, there are also qualitative aspects. We often hear from clients that, thanks to our platform, their management boards have started considering sustainability issues. They purchase access, generate reports, discuss the results. As an organization, they have taken an important step in recognizing and better understanding their impact. They are now analysing how to reduce this negative impact. Clients tell us that the data they saw about themselves on our platform served as a stimulus for change, for making specific decisions. For example, purchasing hybrid cars instead of traditional ones, changing oil in machinery, or conducting building thermomodernisation.

Do you consider yourselves a positive impact startup?



We are a business. Financial aspects are important to us, but that's why we chose to operate in the impact sphere. We consciously wanted to work in the field of sustainable development, responding to climate change. To contribute a small part to improve the lives of ourselves, people, and future generations. Our company combines these two aspects. Firstly, we are a company, not a charity organization. Secondly, the impact aspect of our activity is very important to us.



So, it's time for an introduction.
Who makes up Envirly?

Currently, I work with Mateusz Masiak, who is the CEO of the company. I am the Vice President. Mateusz is responsible for fundraising, investor relations, and focuses more on the product side. My areas of responsibility include sales, marketing, and the substantive side of sustainable development. We both believe that entrepreneurship is a good and effective way to act for the planet. I have some experience working in foundations and the public sector, but I feel more comfortable making an impact through my own business. It gives me a greater sense of agency and motivation. Good impact is very important to me personally, and the same goes for Mateusz.

As for the team, we currently employ 15 people. This number is constantly changing as we are growing quite dynamically, while also keeping our budget in mind. The range of competencies at Envirly is typical for a software company. We have a team of developers, a business team, sales and marketing, customer support, and a team related to ESG expertise. Of course, there are also administrative HR and accounting functions.

How did you come up with this business idea?
With today's reporting obligations, it is almost brilliant in its simplicity.



From the beginning, we operated in a small group of founders. Our interests related to sustainable development and the environment helped us. We were thinking about what was missing in this area of the market. We were particularly interested in the perspective of businesses and organizations. We also wondered about consumer choices - on what basis should they know whether a company is environmentally friendly or not? How can companies be assessed in this regard? Do companies even want to be evaluated, and do they see that they can build competitive advantages in this area? During our research, we came across the draft CSRD directive, which was intended to oblige companies to report on sustainable development issues. That was decisive. Regulation helped us make the decision. We started working on the MVP [Minimum Viable Product] and talking to prospective clients.



What is your biggest challenge?

At this stage of our business, it's acquiring clients and business partners. Every company faces this challenge. And further growth is very important to us.

There is a significant demand in the market for similar services. I assume some competition has emerged as well. What sets you apart?



There are many solutions that address the same needs. Companies can use modern tools like Envirly, or they can approach consulting firms or develop something similar internally by training their team or hiring an expert. Our differentiating factor is providing the client with a tool for self-service, offering competitive pricing compared to consulting services, and the ability to measure and monitor progress in real-time. We provide a platform for managing the entire process, not just a closed document. Our clients are companies that want to take matters into their own hands. They want a tool to manage independently and understand all the processes. It's not about calculating something for a report once and forgetting about it.



What methodology do you follow, and does it ensure compliance with reporting standards?

We operate according to the GHG Protocol and ISO 14064, which pertains to organizational carbon footprint. We also adhere to other standards relevant to specific areas. For example, sustainable development reporting now follows ESRS (European Sustainability Reporting Standard) or EU standards. Compliance with requirements is crucial for us. Otherwise, clients won't be interested in our services.

What market trends would you highlight for our readers?

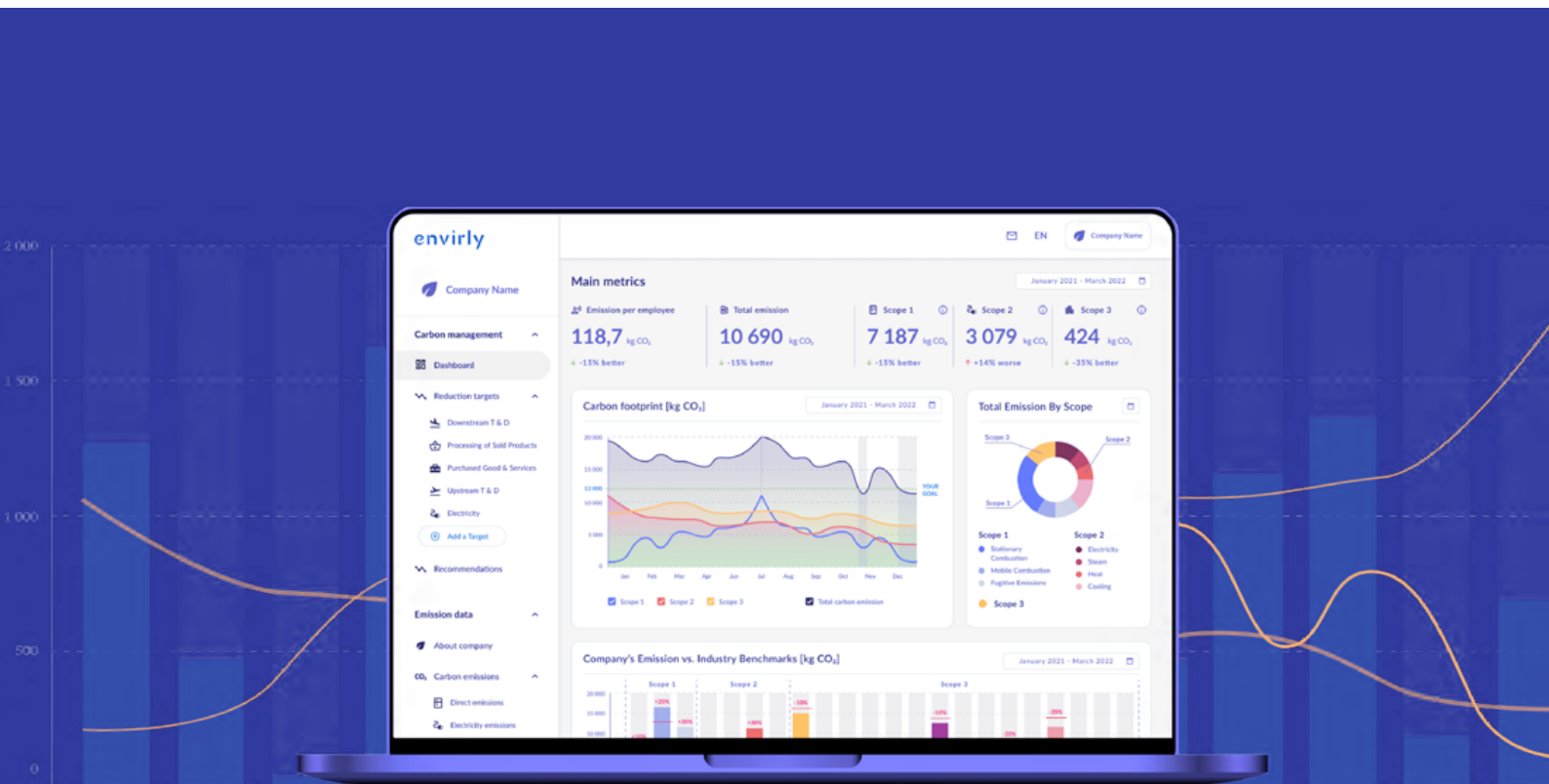


In my opinion, the general attitude toward sustainable development, transparency, and reporting is significant. It's not just about regulations and obligations; there are benefits as well. I want to emphasize that transitioning to renewable energy brings fast returns on investment and mitigates risks associated with price fluctuations. ESG also provides significant reputational benefits. There's increased interest from employees for whom these issues are becoming increasingly important. In other words, it's not just a stick but also a carrot.



What advice would you give to aspiring entrepreneurs who want to make an impact?

Be persistent. You may not realize your initial idea. You may need to discuss it not with hundreds but thousands of people. You may have to pivot and change direction. But don't give up. "What doesn't kill you makes you stronger" – I recommend singing that to yourself during challenging moments. It gives me encouragement.



What are your business plans?



It depends on the market expectations in the field of sustainable development. Currently, CSRD and carbon footprint are important to us. Our next products will depend on trends and needs. We aim to start with advisory services, acting as consultants, and then transform services into ready-made products where we see significant demand. We are in a phase of dynamic growth. Just today, we acquired four new clients.



So, it's difficult to say what Envirly will be like in 5 years?

Yes, it's even hard to say what it will be like in a year.



2.



RESQL

Creating a Better School Climate

"From the very beginning, we wanted the solution to be owned by the creators so that we could develop it as a publicly available solution that would address specific problems as long as there is a need, rather than ending with the completion of the research project."

Aleksandra Dik in an interview with **Piotr Ciszek**, President of the Management Board of RESQL, whose mission is to enhance the safety of children and young people in schools by early identification and prevention of problems.

Guardians of goodness - they react when someone is harmed, feeling lost, helpless, or lonely. Students in any Polish school can take on this role. RESQL offers such possibilities - a tool that allows children and young people to anonymously report any problems they or their peers experience to intervention teachers using a user-friendly mobile application.

RESQL is an innovative system that supports schools in addressing peer violence issues. It was developed as a result of scientific work by a team of experts from the SWPS University of Humanities. It addresses three significant problems present in Polish schools:

1. School violence in various forms, including physical, verbal, and psychological.
2. The lack of a safe and anonymous reporting system for violent incidents to school personnel,
3. The absence of a comprehensive preventive and intervention system, including action procedures for teachers and educators.

Its advantage lies in an evidence-based approach. This means that the proposed methods have scientifically validated ways of influencing children's mental well-being and problem-solving.

The effectiveness of RESQL, coupled with the scale of the needs it addresses, is evident as the system has been implemented in over 100 Polish schools in just over two years since the startup's establishment. Several hundred more schools are

interested in adopting this tool. Approximately 22,000 children already have access to the application, and thousands of educational professionals have been trained.

During the development of this interview, RESQL established a collaboration with the Great Orchestra of Christmas Charity, which decided to finance the implementation of the system in 50 selected schools. Prior to that, on April 27th of this year, the City of Katowice implemented RESQL in 27 Katowice schools with funding from UNICEF.

Why was RESQL created?
What social challenges
does it address?



Research shows that 7 out of 10 children and young people experience peer violence in schools. Such violence can take various forms: physical, relational, verbal, material, sexual, and cyberbullying. Often, teachers are unaware of it because most incidents occur behind their backs, during breaks, outside of school, or in online social media spaces. Children who experience violence typically show visible effects, such as lower grades, mood deterioration, emotional problems, decreased attendance, and physical injuries. This also negatively impacts witnesses of violence (feeling intimidated, worsened classroom atmosphere, reluctance to attend school), and consequently, the entire school environment. The problem is that cases of peer violence are reported sporadically: victims feel ashamed or fearful, while witnesses fear confrontation and the reactions of peers or teachers. Self-harm has also become an increasingly frequent problem.

RESQL was developed as a systemic tool not only to deal with the consequences but primarily to prevent peer violence. It is the first solution of its kind in Poland and unique on a European scale. It is largely the original idea of Małgorzata Wójcik, PhD, one of the most recognized authorities in this field in Poland. The founders of RESQL also include Piotr Rycielski, PhD, and Radosław Kaczan, PhD, from SWPS University. The system is the result of scientific research and studies conducted by a team of psychologists and educators from SWPS University, as well as pilot classes and lessons carried out in collaboration with the school community (teachers, students, school management, parents).

We are parents ourselves and we know what the situation in education looks like. Our motto is "Improving the School Climate," and we are committed to creating an environment where children feel more confident, safe, and can develop and grow in a friendly atmosphere.



How does RESQL work?

The main objective is to activate witnesses of violence and facilitate communication flow between students and trusted adults. This is made possible through the tools offered by RESQL. The system consists of a mobile application for students, an administrative panel for schools, 11 tested educational lessons, 4 training sessions (2 for intervention teachers, school staff, student council), action scenarios, support materials, informational posters, regular updates, technical and substantive support.

Students have access to a mobile application through which they can report anything that worries them completely anonymously. This can relate to themselves or their peers. On the other side, there is a specific intervention teacher known by the student's name and surname, who, in collaboration with other school staff, takes appropriate actions. Importantly, the student decides which teacher to report to and how long they wish to remain anonymous.

The role of witnesses is crucial as approximately 70% of reports come from them. Research also shows that the effectiveness of resolving school problems reaches 75% when students are involved in the resolution process. The system also has a preventive function. Perpetrators of violence know that they are no longer immune and often refrain from undesirable behaviours.

The tool has proven effective not only in detecting peer violence.



That's true. There have already been cases where it led to the establishment of blue cards for victims of domestic violence. The reports came from students who were concerned about their peers and wanted to help them.

The system also proved effective during lockdown and remote learning. We were just entering the market when this situation occurred, and we were surprised. We even faced the dilemma of what to do with our project. During remote learning, certain forms of violence do not occur due to isolation. However, as expected, there was an increase in online violence. Additionally, children faced enormous emotional problems arising from the pandemic threat, being confined at home, which stopped being a place of rest for them and instead became a source of limited freedom, conflicts within the family. We are aware that the current cases of peer aggression or self-harm are partially a result of those issues.

RESQL also proved itself in the face of another challenge, which was the war in Ukraine. We adapted our system to Ukrainian, Russian, and English languages so that children from Ukraine who started attending schools in Poland could also benefit from it. We financed this with the prize money we received for our startup in the Warsaw Booster21 competition.



What is your operating model?

When creating RESQL, we knew that we wanted to establish a company. From the very beginning, we wanted the solution to be owned by the creators so that we could develop it in the market as a publicly available solution that would address specific problems as long as there is a need, rather than ending with the completion of the research project. We started commercializing it, seeking investors and opportunities for development. We are focused on the scalability of our solution, not just its uniqueness.

Who is your target audience and how much does the implementation of the system cost?



Our clients are schools. The end users are children and adolescents in grades VI-VIII of primary and secondary schools. We reach them through local governments, as school governing bodies, psychologists, educators, parents, and educational staff. We use participation in conferences and industry events, cooperation with the media, and social media to reach them. When there is a request, we send informational materials and attend meetings at schools.

The implementation of RESQL is associated with two fees, the first being a one-time fee of PLN 3,000, which covers system implementation and training. The school receives crisis response materials and lesson scenarios on topics such as relational violence, cyberbullying, responding to violence and the role of witnesses, conflict resolution, and socio-moral thinking with methodologies and materials tested in the school environment (materials developed in collaboration with children and teachers). The second fee is a licensing fee of PLN 1 per student per month. The price depends on the number of students; for example, in a school with around 200 children, the cost of maintaining the system would be approximately PLN 2,000 per year. We sign an agreement for the full calendar year, but the fee is equivalent to 10 months.

We assist schools in obtaining funding, such as from local government funds (so-called "cork funds"), non-governmental organizations, and help them reach sponsors, and even acquire sponsors among private companies. We have a sponsorship offer for businesses that aligns with CSR and ESG activities and has been met with increasing interest.

What are the advantages of RESQL?



The biggest advantage is undoubtedly its unique systemic approach, providing a tool for anonymous communication along with an educational package and materials that can be used for prevention and intervention purposes. Our strength lies in solid scientific foundations and the support of SWPS University, with which we closely cooperate. This gives us access to one of the best teams in the field of behavioural-cognitive psychology and developmental support. We owe immense thanks to SWPS University as an institution, Ewa Ger, PhD, the General Director, for their support and belief in us, and Ms. Iwona Gawrycka, the Director of the Knowledge Transfer Center, who supported the commercialization process and provided us with space and opportunities to operate.

We have creators who are experts in their field, a scientifically validated tool, a technological partner, SpeedNet.pl, who knows how to optimize processes related to the system's functioning. We also have a market that needs this solution.



What is RESQL's mission?

Our mission is to enhance the safety of children and adolescents in schools through early identification and prevention of problems, emphasizing prevention rather than extinguishing fires that have already occurred. We aim to achieve this by:

- Supporting psychologists and teachers in working with students through the implementation of scientific preventive and intervention solutions.
- Increasing qualifications related to preventing peer violence among education sector employees.
- Promoting a systemic solution to counter peer violence.

Behind us is our scientific experience, but we are driven by passion, genuine enthusiasm, and belief in what we do.

What are your plans for the future?



We plan to enter foreign markets, initially focusing on Central and Eastern Europe, where the education system is similar to ours, as well as English-speaking countries. In the longer term, we are considering the United States, although additional research will be needed on the forms of violence prevalent there, such as gun violence.



Thank you for the interview, and I wish you success in implementing RESQL.

3.



SeniorApp

Help at Your Fingertips

"First and foremost, it's about caring for people who are dependent or lonely. It's also essential to counter digital exclusion and break down technological barriers among seniors."

Aleksandra Dik in conversation with **Przemysław Mroczek**, CEO of SeniorApp, who wants us to see the person and their needs first, and only then the money.

SeniorApp is a free nationwide platform for mobile devices and websites that enables seniors, people with disabilities, and their families to easily and quickly find assistance, both in daily care and occasional household tasks. SeniorApp activates the market of caregiving services, supports the activities of social assistance centres, educates seniors about internet safety, and prevents their digital exclusion.

The idea, born out of personal experiences of its initiators, is also a response to enormous social and market needs. Within two years, it has already gathered over 47,000 users who are seeking care for themselves or their loved ones, and more than 12,000 verified caregivers willing to provide assistance.

Where did the idea for the SeniorApp application come from?



For the past 10 years, my mother, even during her retirement, helped other seniors. It was either temporary or daily care. The needs were significant. Every now and then, she would ask me if I knew someone who could help and take care of another senior. At that time, I would write a post on Facebook, seeking such a person. However, the problem was verifying the applications in terms of the appropriate skills, experience, and honesty of potential caregivers. On the other hand, Igor Marczak's mother, my partner, was ill for many years and required constant care. We decided to give up our previous professional obligations in the companies where we worked and invest all our savings in creating a platform that would be socially responsible.

From the very beginning, the platform was designed by seniors for seniors. We wanted it to be as intuitive and functional as possible for them. We researched various expectations and types of services. We tested the application with seniors' involvement. Currently, we have over 47,000 registered users and more than 12,000 verified caregiver profiles in our database. We offer over 28 different types of services in several areas: technological, caregiving, medical, cleaning, courier, and pet care. In addition to standard services, we have a section called "I Want More." Here, our users can find offers from partners, such as round-the-clock telephone medical consultations.



The SeniorApp Foundation was also established. What is its goal?

Thanks to the Foundation, care is provided to individuals who cannot afford to hire someone to help them. When we started developing the platform, the City Office of Łódź approached us with a proposal for cooperation with the local social assistance center. This happened a year later, when we gained experience, acquired the necessary knowledge, and built a database of verified caregivers. Currently, we already have 300 care recipients in Łódź, whom we provide assistance to free of charge based on our cooperation with the Municipal Social Assistance Center.

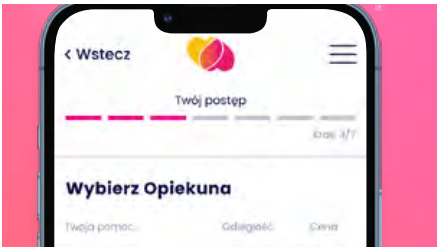
In addition, the Foundation creates and implements educational programs aimed at overcoming barriers in accessing technology for marginalized individuals, to enable them to navigate the digital world smoothly and safely.

How does the SeniorApp platform work?



SeniorApp is a free platform for users seeking care and caregivers offering various services. Downloading the application and registering a profile in the system are free of charge. Seniors or their family members can request appropriate services, such as cleaning, shopping, or care, by selecting a specific person from the database of verified caregivers. Both parties can contact each other to discuss the details of the requested tasks.

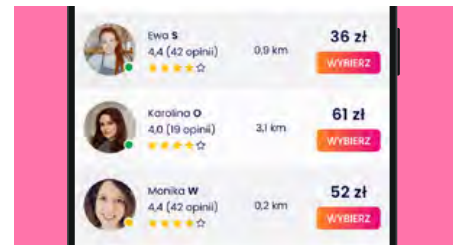
Fees are associated with the ordered services, and the prices are determined by the caregivers. Payment is made cashless through the SeniorApp wallet, which users can top up themselves through our platform or remotely by someone from their family. Payment can be made using contactless methods, traditional postal or online transfers. Cash can only be used for expenses such as purchases based on receipts. Users rate each other using stars, which is an important recommendation for others.



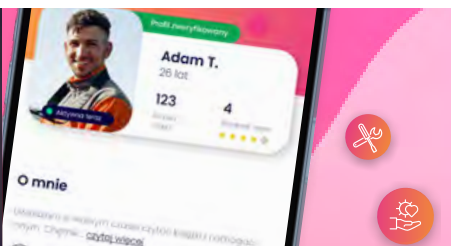
Who are the users of the SeniorApp application?

According to our data, over 60% of orders in our application are generated by people aged 45-65 and older. There are also many users from the 25-34 age group. These are relatives, such as children or grandchildren, who live far away from their loved ones and use the application to order remote care for them. On the other hand, 90% of caregivers are individuals aged 18-44 who earn additional income for their household budget or student grants through these services. Some of them provide services that require qualifications and experience in caregiving, while others perform simple tasks such as house cleaning or shopping.

You attach great importance to user safety.



That's correct, and it's our priority. Verification involves, among other things, confirming the bank account number, checking the sexual offender registry, and for nurses, midwives, and physiotherapists, we require proof of professional qualifications. Monetary funds are transferred to the caregiver's account only after confirmation by the senior or the person who placed the order that the service has been satisfactorily completed.



What are the social challenges that the platform addresses?

First and foremost, it's about caring for people who are dependent or lonely. It's also essential to counter digital exclusion and break down technological barriers among seniors. We provide education in this area, publishing free content on various topics on our website and social media. We provide practical knowledge, such as how to check bus or train schedules, buy tickets, or use online banking. Our partners play a significant role in supporting and financing these initiatives.

What is the support from business partners and what benefits do they gain?



We have a package of various promotional and educational services. This allows seniors to participate in free workshops, while companies can carry out socially responsible initiatives.



What is your business model?

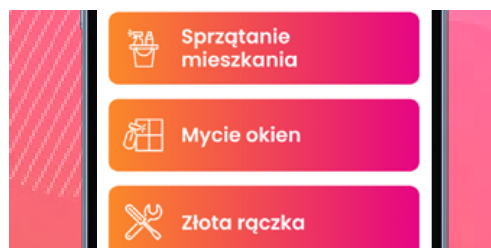
We finance ourselves through a commission for well-executed services, charging 15% of the caregiver's remuneration. Another important source of funding is our partners. In the Foundation, all donations are used to provide care services for dependent individuals. We assist people without means to support themselves and strive to ensure their care. Currently, we do it on a micro-scale, in Łódź, but ultimately, we want to provide such services not only in large cities but also in smaller towns. This requires financial resources.



How do you reach individuals who are unable to provide care for themselves?

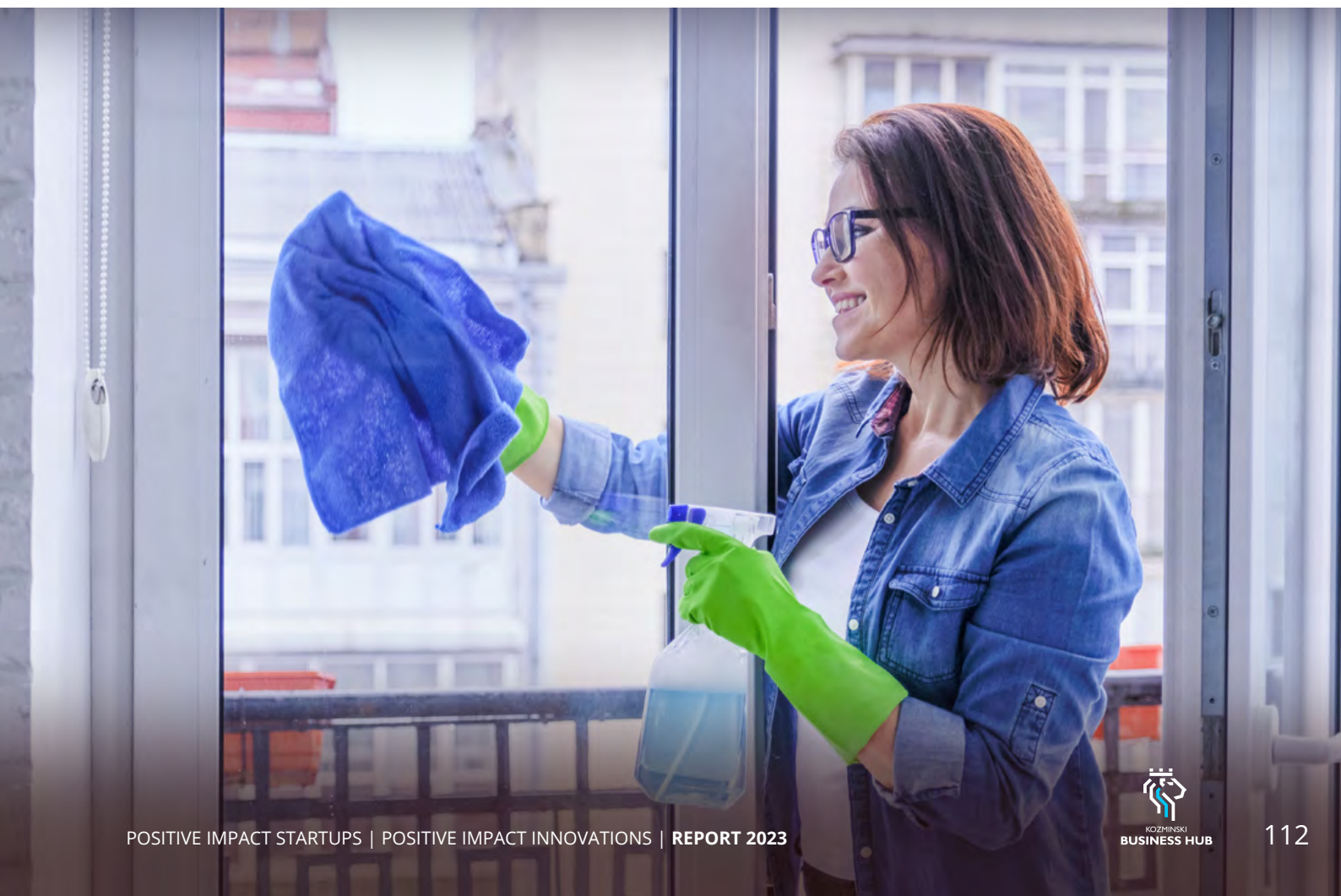


The ways are diverse, it can be a referral to the Foundation, for example, from neighbours, family members, indicating a person in need, and we consult it with the Municipal Social Welfare Center (MOPS) so that the center is aware of the situation. Together, we agree on the scope of care and the duration. It can also be a direct referral to the care center, in which case MOPS contacts us.



How do you recruit caregivers for seniors?

The majority of caregivers are private individuals who want to earn additional income for their household budget. They account for 90% of all caregivers. Some of the remaining caregivers are self-employed individuals or service companies. They can create a business account on our platform and have the opportunity to promote their services. However, we focus on private individuals, gig workers, to give them the opportunity for additional earnings.





In which direction do you plan to develop SeniorApp?

We want to be present in smaller towns as well. The application is already available from anywhere, it can be downloaded anywhere, and caregivers can register in any, even the smallest, locality. However, for everything to function smoothly, a well-functioning structure is needed: a database of verified caregivers and users from a specific location. That's why we are gradually expanding for now.

Local governments from other countries, such as Spain, Italy, and the United Kingdom, approach us as they also face difficulties in providing care for the elderly. We are happy to share our experiences.

Currently, we are implementing an innovative mobile application project for students of medical universities and schools with medical profiles regarding student internships, which can be carried out by taking care of seniors. The project will eventually be part of the SeniorApp platform. Technically, it is already ready for implementation. The challenge lies in legal issues arising from regulations stating that medical internships must be supervised by a lecturer or internship supervisor. We are working on a suitable solution. We aim to complete this process by the end of this year.

What are the challenges that SeniorApp must overcome?



Operating the platform is very costly. We constantly update it, introduce new solutions, and gather feedback from users. At this point, I would like to thank our investors - Pracuj Ventures, a fund belonging to the Pracuj.pl group, and Dawid Urban for their support and belief in what we do. Thanks to them, we have greater freedom of action and can focus on platform development. This is crucial for a socially responsible startup. Ensuring the security of data and information collected by the platform is a significant challenge, and we attach great importance to it.



Is SeniorApp a positive impact startup, and why?

We consider ourselves a positive impact startup because we prioritize good over money. We are mature professionals who decided to create a company with a mission and vision that responds to market needs. Business and financial calculations come later. We are glad that investors who understand and see the sense and value of our venture have crossed our path.

We have already received many awards for our platform, but what brings us the most joy is being able to help someone in need because it means we are fulfilling our mission. We don't leave people to fend for themselves. Everyone is important to us. I would like to see more startups like ours, where we prioritize the human and their needs before money. We want to change the world for the better.



Thank you for the interview, and I wish you success in the development of the platform.



4.



Vermico

Composting in Business

"Changing little in their daily habits, a company can do so much for the environment."

Klementyna Sęga in conversation with **Wiktoria Kozłowska**, CEO of Vermico, who proves that composting is effective, profitable, and has a positive impact.

Vermico is an intuitive next-generation composter that allows for easy and fast composting. But has composting ever been... difficult? one might ask. Perhaps so, as it is estimated that the potential for municipal bio-waste in Poland is around 4.8 million tons, yet only 30% of this mass is utilized.

We're talking on the occasion of this year's Positive Impact Startups report. Do you consider yourself such a startup?



Positive impact is one of Vermico's main missions. We create an innovative solution that supports companies in sustainable management of bio-waste generated in their offices. With the help of an intelligent composting system with California earthworms, we harness the potential of bio-waste and transform it into high-quality plant fertilizer - bio humus, in one of the noblest forms of coprolite.

The process also contributes to the reduction of greenhouse gases (methane and nitrous oxide) emitted during traditional waste collection, even before they are taken from offices to municipal processing facilities. However, the most important value for us is education and inspiring office employees to take pro-environmental actions through workshops, various initiatives, and communication support.



Composting is a well-known and old method of managing bio-waste - those who have a garden or backyard are familiar with the amazing power of compost. And yet, your solution is innovative! What sets Vermico apart from other companies on the market offering composters?

Vermico, as the first vermicomposter on the market, allows for efficient and ecological composting of waste in the office, using natural decomposition processes. The device is equipped with an intelligent monitoring system that constantly supervises the conditions inside. Controlling this process makes composting faster and minimizes the risk of undesirable biological phenomena that often occur during ordinary composting of bio-waste in indoor conditions, such as odours, mould, decay, and fermentation. We also ensure that the environment inside the vermicomposter is optimal for the earthworms. Therefore, our service is key, supporting the client in the composting process. We provide composting management, so by changing so little in their daily habits, a company can do so much for the environment.

What can large-scale composting practice change in waste management? Can it have a greater impact on the results we have in Poland regarding the amount of bio-waste?



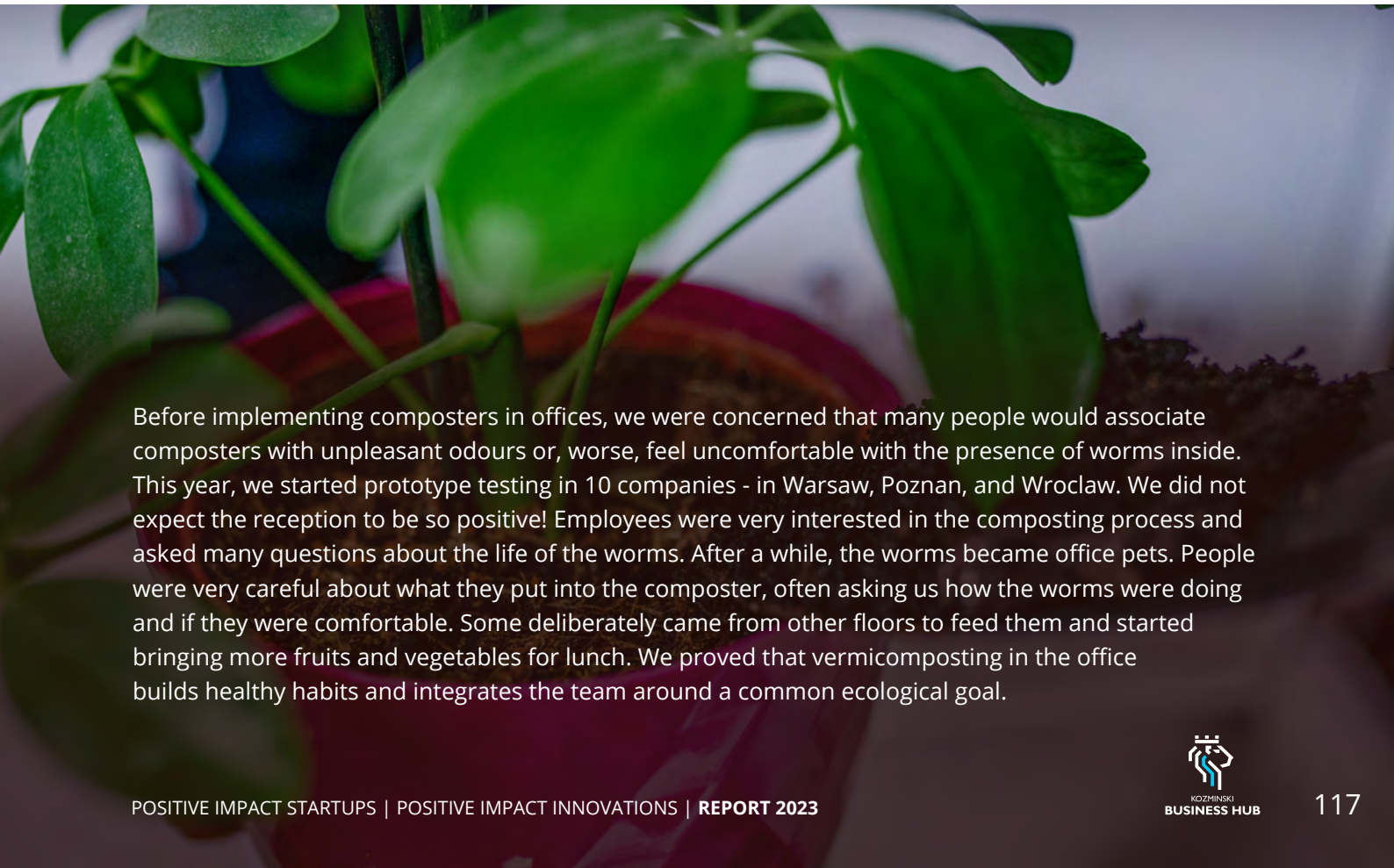
Composting is one of the key processes in waste management. It allows for the low-cost transformation of bio-waste, such as food scraps, leaves, or branches, into valuable organic fertilizer - compost. In this way, the amount of waste going to landfills is reduced, and the emission of harmful greenhouse gases resulting from decomposition in landfills is limited. In Poland, the waste problem is increasingly noticeable. According to data from the Central Statistical Office, in 2019, over 12.4 million tons of municipal waste were generated in Poland. On average, 327 kg of waste per capita, of which about 40% consisted of bio-waste. Through composting, both in households and workplaces, the amount of waste going to landfills can be reduced, and bio-waste can be utilized for the production of valuable fertilizers. Additionally, with the involvement of earthworms, we accelerate the waste transformation process and enrich it with nutrients that are easier for plants to absorb. As a result, we burden the environment less and promote more sustainable waste management practices.

Personally, I love this idea, but it's a bit hard for me to imagine that a whole office building belonging to a large corporation would willingly and enthusiastically switch to composting.

Statistics show that we still have a problem with waste separation into the three basic fractions... How do you plan to convince people to change their habits and become more engaged in waste management, and consequently, in your solution?

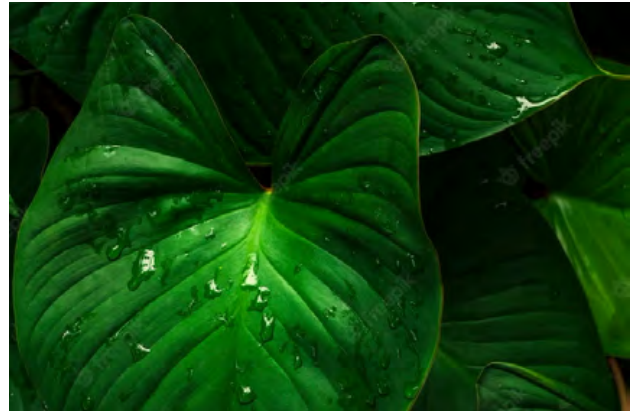
Introducing composting in large office buildings may seem challenging, but it is precisely there that there is enormous potential for reducing the amount of bio-waste and promoting more sustainable waste management practices. It is essential to approach this issue in an integrated and comprehensive manner, as well as to increase awareness of the benefits of composting for both the environment and the company itself. Therefore, we organize workshops, training sessions, and information campaigns that help employees understand how composting contributes to waste reduction and the reduction of harmful gas emissions.

Vermico composters are intelligent and user-friendly. Providing devices of the appropriate size and placing them in strategic locations within the office encourages their use. Regular reports on the amount of waste reduced and bio humus produced contribute to maintaining motivation among employees and show that their efforts have a real impact on the environment - provided that it is not a one-time action but part of a long-term strategy aimed at environmental stewardship.



Before implementing composters in offices, we were concerned that many people would associate composters with unpleasant odours or, worse, feel uncomfortable with the presence of worms inside. This year, we started prototype testing in 10 companies - in Warsaw, Poznan, and Wroclaw. We did not expect the reception to be so positive! Employees were very interested in the composting process and asked many questions about the life of the worms. After a while, the worms became office pets. People were very careful about what they put into the composter, often asking us how the worms were doing and if they were comfortable. Some deliberately came from other floors to feed them and started bringing more fruits and vegetables for lunch. We proved that vermicomposting in the office builds healthy habits and integrates the team around a common ecological goal.

So Vermico is Victoria, worms, and...? Who else is involved in your startup, and how did your paths cross, leading you to run a business together?



Currently, the Vermico team consists of 4 people. I met Karol and Lucy during my studies at the Scientific Circle Council of Poznan University of Technology. Even back then, we were involved in the field of new technologies and innovations, supporting initiatives and projects undertaken by students. After graduating, we were looking for an idea for a startup where we could combine our passion for ecology with technical and business skills. We came up with the idea of a composter by chance, but we immediately fell in love with it! We started designing a composter specifically for B2B clients and office spaces, and it turned out to be a perfect fit.

After graduating, we formed a complementary team. Professionally, I am a project manager, Lucy is our marketing ninja, and Karol is responsible for hardware and software. However, we still needed one more specialist to help us take care of our worms. Eventually, we met Kuba, who holds a doctorate from the University of Life Sciences and works in the field of composting technology. He was an expert in one of the accelerator programs we participated in and evaluated our project from a biotechnological perspective. After the first meeting, we felt that he would be a perfect fit for our team, both in terms of skills and personality. Recruiting him to Vermico took only a moment.



And how do you manage in the startup reality? What is the biggest challenge for a business like yours?



Our biggest challenge is building environmental awareness and gaining the trust of potential clients. Vermico's intelligent composter is an innovative and eco-friendly product, which shows that the recycling industry can still surprise with something new. We want to prove to companies that are still sceptical about implementing composters in offices that composting is effective, profitable, and has a positive impact on the company's environment.

We are pleased to see that Positive Impact Startups are becoming increasingly popular in Poland. More and more programs and competitions focus not only on the business model and scalability but also evaluate the startup's impact on society and the natural environment. Presentations and pitching require a lot of preparation time, but they develop us and give us the opportunity to talk about something we love and infect others with the idea of vermicomposting.



I am completely convinced of your solution, and I will be rooting for you! Finally, please tell me about your plans for the near future.

More and more companies are seeking eco-innovations, and employees want to work in organizations that have a positive impact on the environment and society. We want to be part of this movement and support our clients in taking steps towards sustainable development. There is still a lot of work ahead of us, but we feel that we are on the right track, especially after the positive reception of our composters so far. At the moment, we are mainly focused on product development and business scaling. As I mentioned before, education and raising environmental awareness in offices are key challenges for our business. That is our mission, and we hope to instill the idea of composting in an increasing number of companies. We are starting our operations in Warsaw and Poznan, but we would like our composters and services to be available in other major cities in Poland and even abroad in the future.

Thank you for the conversation.



Positive Impact Startups



LISTS OF WINNERS POSITIVE IMPACT STARTUPS 2022

- Bez Ości – Vegan Fish facebook.com/bezosci.veganfish
- BreadPack breadpack.pl
- myEgg myegg.pl
- Outriders outride.rs
- Rebread rebread.com
- ZNIKA znika.pl
- Hydrum hydrum.eu
- Lumelabel lumelabel.wixsite.com
- Orbify orbify.com
- Plenti plenti.app
- SafeKiddo safekiddo.com
- Wektoo wektoo.com
- FibriTech fibri.tech
- FoodBugs foodbugs.pl
- Humati.co humati.co
- Nanoseen nanoseen.com
- Slow Media Production slowmediaproduction.com
- Swapp! swapp.zone
- Calmsie calmsie.ai
- Co z tym seksem? web.coztymseksemapp.pl



Positive Impact Startups



2021

LISTS OF WINNERS POSITIVE IMPACT STARTUPS 2021

- All Hands Agency allhands.agency
- Alternation the-alternation.com
- Associated.apps associatedapps.com
- Bazar Miejski bazarmiejski.com
- Circular Scrap circularscrap.com
- Cool Beans coolbeans.com.pl
- CoopTech Hub hub.plz.pl
- Dotlenieni dotlenieni.org
- eKodama ekodama.pl
- Heca atoheca.pl
- Microbe+ microbe-plus.com/pl
- Patronite patronite.pl
- Plan Be Eco planbe.eco
- Pożycz To pozycz.to
- Serce Miasta sercemiesta.waw.pl
- Słuszna Strawa slusznastrawa.org
- Sun Roof sunroof.se
- Take!Cup takecup.pl
- Tech To The Rescue techtotherescue.org
- Wojna warzyw wojnawarzyw.pl
- Zodzysq zodzysq.pl

Positive Impact Startups



LISTS OF WINNERS

POSITIVE IMPACT SCALEUPS CATEGORY 2020

- Elementy elementywear.com
- HiProMine hipromine.com
- SiDLY Care sidly-care.eu
- Slowhop slowhop.com
- Syntoil syntoil.pl
- Warsaw Genomics warsawgenomics.pl

LISTS OF WINNERS

POSITIVE IMPACT STARTUPS CATEGORY 2020

- BACtrem bactrem.pl
- Barents barents.pl
- Cosmetomat cosmetomat.pl
- Krakowska Elektrownia Społeczna elektrowniaspoleczna.pl
- Kuchnia Konflikту kuchniakonfliktu
- MakeGrowLab makegrowlab.com
- Mamo Pracuj mamopracuj.pl
- Planet Heroes planetheroes.pl
- Polishgreens listnycud.pl
- Pora na Pola poranapola.pl
- TupTupTup tuptuptup.org.pl
- Ubrania do oddania ubraniadooddania.pl
- Vege Smak vegesmak.pl
- Your Kaya yourkaya.com

Positive Impact Startups



2019

LISTS OF WINNERS
POSITIVE IMPACT STARTUPS 2019

- Airror airror.pl
- Bezmięsny Mięśny bezmiesnymiesny.pl
- Bio2materials bio2materials.com
- Cantino cantino.pl
- EcoBean ecobean.pl
- Foodsi foodsi.pl
- Good Wood Poland goodwoodpoland.pl
- Jan Barba janbarba.com
- Mydlarnia Cztery Szpaki 4szpaki.pl
- Nieteraz nieraz.pl
- Offee offee.pl
- RoślinnieJemy roslinniejemy.org
- Solace Housing solace.house
- Some Wear Else swelse
- Wege Siostry wegesiostry.pl
- Woskowijki by Malu woskowijki.pl

Positive Impact Startups

2018



LISTS OF WINNERS POSITIVE IMPACT STARTUPS 2018

- Biblioteka Ubrań bibliotekaubran.pl
- Bioseco bioseco.com
- Deaf Respect deafrespect.com
- DEKOEKO ekoeko.com
- DrOmnibus dromnibus.com
- Earth-Heart earth-heart.pl
- Gerere gerere.com
- HandyShower handyshower.pl
- Holoroad holoroad.eu
- inijOB inijob.com
- KOKOworld kokoworld.pl
- Kosmos dla dziewczynek kosmosdldziewczynek.pl
- Leżę i Pracuję lezeipracuje.pl
- LokalnyRolnik lokalnyrolnik.pl
- Łąka laka.org.pl
- MAMA Pożyczka mamapozyczka.pl
- Manumania manumania.org
- Nepalove nepalove.com
- Panato panato.org
- Planeta Kreatorów Planeta-kreatorow
- Polska Witalna polskawitalna.pl
- Pszczelarium sklep.pszczelarium.pl
- REC.ON rec-on.eu
- Social Wolves Socialwolves
- Use Bike rentabike.usebike.pl
- Vegi vegi.eu
- Wióry lecą wioryleca.pl
- WoshWosh woshwosh.pl
- Życie jest fajne KlubokawiarniaZycieJestFajne

