

# EPIC Slovakia: Developing municipality social businesses with professional assistance



The project 'Support of municipality social business', implemented by a non-profit organization EPIC Slovakia, is aimed at promotion of the social economy among Slovak municipalities. By offering a comprehensive support in recognition of business opportunities and cooperation with experts and volunteers from the private business sector, EPIC Slovakia helps municipalities to enliven their social economic sectors and therefore facilitate the local job opportunities for individuals with disadvantaged backgrounds.

*'Our main focus is placed on municipalities with very high unemployment rates in and around the central and eastern regions of Slovakia. We believe that these alarming figures can be significantly decreased by establishing sustainable municipality enterprises that will consequently enhance job opportunities for unemployed local inhabitants,'* says Zuzana Polačková, regional coordinator for Europe at EPIC Slovakia.



Vladimír Ledecký, the mayor of Spišský Hrhov municipality with Michal Smetanka, expert for social business within the EPIC team.

## Professional Assistance in Identifying Local Business Opportunities

There are many challenges that municipalities face in their efforts to establish a thriving and financially sustainable social economic sector. EPIC Slovakia therefore offers a comprehensive range of supporting activities, including professional assistance in identifying

the local business opportunities and elaborating business plans and financial strategies. *'Our main objective is to fully support municipalities in formation of their business plans that will subsequently serve as a quality basis for operating successful social businesses,'* adds Zuzana Polačková.



EPIC team visits Dravce municipality with volunteers- experts for IT technologies, wine and coffee distribution and beekeeping.

*'A large majority of Slovak municipalities lack the actual experience with undertaking business. Another big issue is that they have no capacities to identify the real business opportunities in their area,'* Dagmar Mokra, a project manager at EPIC Slovakia comments on the main obstacles for a successful development of the municipality businesses. EPIC Slovakia together with its partner organization therefore created 'Catalogue of business opportunities', which contains 23 business opportunities identified directly in the municipalities. These include possibilities in the fields of gardening, construction or even milk production, with detailed descriptions of the financial, material and human resource requirements. The mayors can select examples from the catalogue and with the active assistance of highly qualified advisors who have extensive knowledge of the social economy sector, transform these ideas into comprehensive business plans. *'EPIC Slovakia has also organized trainings for participating municipalities focused on acquiring the knowledge necessary to elaborate the sustainable business plans, such as market research, financial calculations or product analysis,'* adds Dagmar Mokra.

*'We believe that our activities aimed at the establishment of social economic sector by municipalities is applicable in other European countries as well. We see a big potential in connecting volunteers from private business sector and municipalities. This can strongly contribute to identification of sustainable business opportunities.'*

Zuzana Polačková, regional coordinator for Europe at EPIC Slovakia

## Expertise by Private Ventures

Furthermore EPIC Slovakia is closely cooperating with volunteers from the private sector who are running their own businesses: *'At the moment we are working together with 14 volunteers who are willing to share their valuable knowledge and experience with the municipalities,'* says Dagmar Mokra. The volunteers provide the municipalities with the 'outside' view, know-how on undertaking businesses, expertise and supervision during the process of preparation of the business plans. The volunteers together with the EPIC Slovakia team pay individual visits to the Slovak municipalities, which serve as a great opportunity for the mayors to discuss their concerns revolving around running social business. *'This cooperation has proved to be very fruitful as the volunteers have a plethora of experience and strongly contribute to the motivation of municipalities in building local social enterprises,'* further continues Dagmar Mokra.

## Spišský Hrhov: Inspirational model of Flourishing Social Business Sector

According to Zuzana Polačková, EPIC Slovakia efforts were strongly inspired by the successful story of the municipality Spišský Hrhov: *'The social business sector evolved there more than 15 years ago. Ever since then, the population of Spišský Hrhov has almost doubled while the numbers of employees in the municipality businesses rapidly increased. Nowadays, Spišský Hrhov employs about 50 people and is regarded as the most successful social business in Slovakia.'* EPIC Slovakia and Vladimr Ledecky, the mayor of Spišský Hrhov, therefore closely work in a partnership for a continued successful outcome: *'For instance Vladimr Ledecky gave a lecture to other mayors about his success story of the social business. Moreover he provided us with valuable inputs concerning the content of the Catalogue of business opportunities,'* continues Zuzana Polačková.

The 'Support of municipality social business' project is financed through the Swiss-Slovak Cooperation Programme and is administered by Ekopolis Foundation in Slovakia. The project partner is a Swiss organization -

Social Business Earth. This partnership has the potential to bring to Slovakia a new view of financing the social businesses and solutions for the common problems. The role of Social Business Earth in this project is to ensure correct identification of the business opportunities within Slovak municipalities.

## Great Popularity among the Slovak Municipalities

*'Based on the current experience we have seen a greater interest taken by the municipalities in the social business sector. Although we cooperate with the selected 12 municipalities with the highest rates of unemployment, there are always new ones, who express their interest in the involvement of the project'* says Dagmar Mokra and further explains: *'Currently the business plans are being prepared and we expect to have the first 5 business plans completed and submitted to the local municipality councils by the end of September. But only after establishment of social businesses and starting the real activities, we will be able to measure the number of newly created jobs.'*

## Contact & Information



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Catalogue of business opportunities is available at:  
<http://epic.org.eu/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/katalog-prilezitosti-epic-.pdf>