

STUDENTS DESIGNING SUSTAINABLE FUTURES WITH BE OPEN THINK-TANK AND FOUNDER ELENA BATURINA

La rédaction | [Climate](#), [Education](#), [News](#)

Elena Baturina and her **BE OPEN think-tank** are among those who try to accelerate the shift towards sustainable practices. Former President of an international construction empire, and a long-established member of the Forbes Billionaires list, she founded the philanthropic initiative back in 2012 to support the promising minds of younger generations, and act as an incubator for bright ideas.

Baturina is now a consistent supporter of creative education, innovations and sustainable initiatives. Elena and BE OPEN are responsible for a series of international competitions for young creatives focused on supporting SDGs, one at a time every year since 2019.

What is your personal view, as an entrepreneur and a philanthropist, of our prospects of achieving sustainability in the foreseeable future as a society?

Elena Baturina, Founder of BE OPEN: Sustainability is the best principle we as humanity have to come up with to approach the global-scale problems we face today. Adopting sustainable practices, large and small, has the potential to make a positive impact on the environment, society, and the economy. They can slow down, stop and if we are very lucky and persistent, reverse the consequences of abuse of natural resources, uncontrolled pollution, irresponsible consumption and many more aspects of humanity's destructive impact.

I believe that in the recent years, the intention to transform economics, businesses, and processes into sustainable ones has become an absolute emergency. And realistically speaking, we are very far from reversing, and slowing down may be our best shot right now. But that only means we must work harder.

Could you share the motivation behind starting the student competitions programme as a way to contribute to the SDGs?

EB: Adoption of the SDGs is the most comprehensive programme that encompasses the most pressing challenges of today. These goals have become adequate points of focus for the governments, businesses, financial institutions, centers of innovation and non-profit organizations like BE OPEN who strive to advocate sustainable practices.

Our approach is to raise awareness and educate about the SDGs. Through our competitions, we recognize, promote, financially support and celebrate the best design ideas from young people around the world. And all that serves as motivation to self-educate, research, build connections with mentors and like-minded peers, come up with own ideas and initiatives, learn how to present and pitch them, etc.

These competitions provide a platform for discussions, idea exchanges, and self-education. We aim to boost young people's confidence and help them realize their importance in shaping the future.

How do you evaluate the outcome so far? Do you consider the programme successful?

EB: Every year we collect an ever growing massive number of submissions from students and graduates from all parts of the world. And a great portion of them are consistent, thoughtful, meaningful, well-researched and innovative. It is a common misconception that people in the student years do not take policy-making or sustainability issues serious. They well know that these things are decisive for their future.

Through our competitions and subsequent communication with the winners, we get reassurance that educating and motivating young people to become leaders of sustainable change is the best way forward.

I am convinced that the younger generation of today is more responsible and aware than we were at their age. They do have to carry more on their shoulders, but I rejoice at seeing their incredible commitment, responsiveness and audacity in how they approach whatever problems we ask them to tackle.

What is your opinion of this year's projects overall?

EB: The recently finalised competition, [Designing Futures 2050](#), aimed at encouraging young creatives to reframe and update the SDG agenda based on today's realities. It aimed to inspire them to go beyond the 2030 agenda, and actively participate in developing and implementing realistic and sustainable action plans favourable for their own more distant future.

And if you talk to any of our finalists or winners, you will see how much they are emotionally and intellectually invested in their solutions, each being rooted in good thinking, proper research and great intentions. Of course, no one expects them to save the world overnight, but they are about steady steps, translatable and feasible for people worldwide, that may actually work.

Do you agree with the jury panel on their choice of the first three prizes awardees?

EB: I surely do. First of all, the amount of work the jury members have to do to assess even the short-listed submissions is immense. They need to put a certain score to such criteria as desirability, feasibility, viability, depth of research, novelty, etc. I am happy I don't share that responsibility and workload with them, and I too find the winning three [initiatives](#) amazing examples of what level of innovative thinking and hard work young people are capable of.

Redefining Global Healthcare, our 1st prize, offers a fantastically detailed, sustainable, technology-driven, and community-led take on reorganizing and restructuring healthcare systems, relevant and scalable in most parts of the world.

Ecovironment is a social enterprise led by very young people who do not only battle plastic pollution crisis by recycling plastic waste construction materials, but providing green employment opportunities, training and education to children and youth.

AGASA is a futuristic photobioreactor designed to fight urban carbonization by using microalgae, which can absorb CO₂ up to 50 times more efficiently than terrestrial plants, while the algae biomass can be processed into biofuels. Adding solar panels, IoT sensors, AI is also part of the plan.

What is BE OPEN's vision for the future of these competitions and initiatives?

EB: Our vision is to create a foundation of knowledge for young people to navigate the challenges ahead. By providing opportunities for creative expression, collaboration, and learning, we hope to inspire them to take ownership of shaping the future. Utilizing digital formats, strategic partnerships, and credentialing, we aim to expand the impact of our work and equip a new generation with the skills and perspectives needed for a better tomorrow.

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