



ARTS

Billionaire and sustainability supporter Elena Baturina praises the creative potential of younger generation



By EU Reporter Correspondent



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January 31st the submissions window closed for [‘Design for Sustainable Cities’](#), an international student competition in support of the United Nations’ SDG programme. The competition is co-organised by two great supporters of education in creative disciplines – [BE OPEN](#) creative think-tank and [Cumulus](#) Association of Universities and Colleges of Art, Design and Media.

The competition was launched in October last year and invited students of creative disciplines from basically everywhere to develop their own innovative solutions to the challenges of SDG11: Sustainable Cities and Communities. These challenges include increased carbon emissions and resource use, growing number of slum dwellers, inadequate and overburdened infrastructure and services, worsening air pollution and unplanned urban sprawl, etc. The year of 2020 exposed another drastic problem of city dwellers – the danger of rapid spread of the virus in heavily populated areas.

Both BE OPEN and Cumulus believe that the challenges of the new reality of our daily existence require new solutions; qualitative change is possible only through innovative action, and innovations are only born by bold, inquisitive, creative, out-of-the-box ways of thinking.

That is why the competition cries out to the creative youth, students and graduates of all art, design, architecture and media disciplines of universities and colleges worldwide to encourage them design ideas and projects that embody the principles and aims of United Nations' SDG Programme.



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BE OPEN will award the top ideas submitted by individuals or teams with cash prizes: the main prize winner will be chosen by the jury of design academics and professionals and get €5,000; €3,000 will go to the personal choice of BE OPEN's founder Elena Baturina; the winner of €2,000 of the Public Vote prize will be selected by an open online vote; and a very important inaugural Safe City prize of €2,000 will be awarded to the solution that will be efficient in tackling the detrimental effect of the pandemic in a city.

We have asked Elena Baturina about the plans and aspirations she associates with the competition.

- Why have you chosen SDG11 as a focus for the competition this year?

I am positive that the issues of urbanization carry unmatched importance in 2020. The UN Sustainable Development Goals are in many ways a direct response to the consequences of urbanization.

More than half of the world's population now live in cities, and the percentage is projected to grow to 60% by 2030. This growth goes hand in hand with so many problems that affect well-being of billions of people. We must admit that traditional measures cannot cope with that scope and 'evolution' of these problems, so we desperately need creative thinking – design thinking - and creative action to handle those. Design has a crucial role to play as an instrument or achieving the UN SDGs.

- Tell us about the current stage of the ongoing competition?

Well, we have once again joined forces with the wonderful Cumulus Association of Universities and Colleges of Art, Design and Media. Together we feel we are able to reach out to most schools that teach creative disciplines worldwide and therefore create an opportunity for as many students as possible to benefit from this competition.

We are past the submissions deadline, and starting with February, our teams and the jury will set to the harsh yet exciting task of selecting the top projects that will further compete for the prizes. We already have hundreds of submissions from all over the world, and those I have seen are very promising.

- How meaningful their response seems to you?

The entries are full of good thinking, proper research and great intentions. Of course, they are not meant to save the world overnight, but they are about minor steps, translatable and feasible for the absolute majority of people worldwide, that will actually work.

That is why I am so hopeful that this competition will drive more engagement with young designers and their sustainable solutions from the SDG-focused businesses, state and public bodies that can actually bring them to reality.

- What do you personally look for in the winning submission?

As you probably know, I am first of all a person of business. So I can't help looking at projects from a practical perspective, with the 'how we can actually do it' approach in mind. That is why, I am looking at how well-researched the solution is, will it be in demand, how feasible it is, are there resources at hand to make it work, is it scalable etc. So, the Founder's Choice winner must be a pragmatic solution.

- What does sustainability means to you personally?

At my end, investment has been allocated to sustainability-related businesses, such as solar energy production, energy-efficiency technologies, membrane engineering. As for my everyday life, I try to make positive shifts to greater sustainability as we all should, starting with little yet consistent everyday steps that may not seem that huge an impact, but are necessary to make sustainability part of our joined future.

- Does BE OPEN now account for the possibility of a new pandemic while developing your projects?

Well, we all do. There is an unpredictability factor in everything now, right? But we have been doing well this year, due to the fact that BE OPEN has always had a well-established online presence that helps us easily connect and engage with audiences from all over the world.

With this competition, we can easily carry out all stages safely and with social distancing observed, the only thing that would require a public gathering is the awards ceremony. But even if we have to cancel it once again, we promise that we will not only celebrate the winners online, but do our best to showcase their ideas and talent to as wide public and as many stakeholders as possible.

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