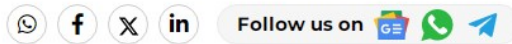


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Billionaire philanthropist Elena Baturina on how creativity should be employed to solve climate issues in the wake of COP28

Adopting sustainable practices, large and small, has the potential to make a positive impact on the environment, society, and the economy

By Alina Kalam



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A consistent supporter of creative education, innovations and sustainable initiatives Elena Baturina spoke to **Emerging Europe** about how sustainability is the best principle, we as humanity have come up with to approach the most burning and grave problems of the planet 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 or even reverse the consequences of abuse of natural resources, uncontrolled pollution, irresponsible consumption and many more aspects of humanity's destructive impact.

In the past few years, in view of the Covid-19 pandemic and ongoing military crises, the intention to transform economics, businesses, and processes into sustainable ones has become an absolute emergency. The most comprehensive programme that encompasses the most pressing global challenges of today is the Sustainable Development Goals adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015. Therefore, these goals has become points of focus for those governments, businesses, financial institutions, centres of innovation and non-profit organisations who strive to advocate and champion sustainable practices all over the world.

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Elena Baturina and her BE OPEN think-tank are among those who try to accelerate the shift towards sustainable practices. A billionaire and former construction mogul, she founded the philanthropy back in 2012 to support the promising minds of younger generations, and act as an incubator for bright ideas.

Having shifted her focus to international investment and philanthropy, 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.

"I totally agree with the United Nations Development Programme that everyone is needed to reach these ambitious targets — the creativity, knowhow, technology and financial resources from all of humanity," Baturina explains the inspiration behind the competition. "Most people think they have nothing to do with global policies, economy or climate issues, and projects like this one can help educate wider audiences that sustainable future is dependent on all of us via the most active, open-minded and fearless demographics."

At the very start of your fifth competition, can you assess the response you receive from your contestants, given that they are quite young?

"It is a common misconception that people in the student years are not interested in politics, sustainability and other things decisive for their future. BE OPEN have always been working with students and graduates, on a whole array of educational projects and competitions, and I am convinced that the younger generation today are more responsible and aware than we were at their age. I see incredible commitment, responsiveness and audacity in how they approach whatever problems we ask them to tackle."

The freshly-launched competition is called Design Your Climate Action and dedicated to SDG13 that calls on the mankind to take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts. SDG 13 is officially correlated with SDG 7 on clean energy, which BE OPEN's previous competition Better Energy by Design was all about, so the two goals are treated as related and complementary.

"Basically, we are asking students and graduates all over the world to search for a creative answer to the question "What can be done to combat climate change and its effects on all the levels of our lives: from introducing new national policies to adopting new technologies by industries and switching to greener practices at home?" and encouraging them to develop the possible answer into a well-researched, innovative and proficient project."

BE OPEN offers money prizes for the top solutions, how big a motivation is that in your opinion? (Five winners will receive prizes that range from 5,000 to 2,000 euro)

"Most of us have been students at some point, and a substantial cash pot, and I think our prizes are quite substantial, is a valid reason to spend some time on shaping a project. It is not the only motivation though — 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 minor steps, translatable and feasible for the absolute majority of people worldwide, that may actually work."

If you a student or a young and upcoming professional with a creative ambition, and you too believe in the necessity of urgent action that will support global shift to a more sustainable future, the competition is now open, any student or recent graduate can submit a project via the website designclimateaction.com. The submissions will be accepted until December 31.

BE OPEN will be present in the Green Zone of the UN COP-28 with their SDG-dedicated competition programme.