



## **Social Cooperative Equality in the 'Wide open for sustainable meetings' series**

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**How to combine the professional integration of socially excluded people and a commitment to sustainability in a catering company? Social Cooperative Equality (Spółdzielnia Socjalna Równość) has been around in the convention and conference business since 2014. In the series 'Wide open for sustainable meetings,' the president of the Social Cooperative Equality, Ms. Teresa Misina, will introduce the company's policy and actual solutions.**

### **What measures in line with the goals of sustainability and corporate social responsibility have been implemented or will be implemented by the end of 2023 in your company?**

Equality Catering (Catering Równość) is an example of a social enterprise that combines economic activity with public utility activity. It serves the professional and social integration of people who are at risk of social marginalisation or exclusion. People are at the core of this enterprise. The company employs people struggling with mental illness, permanently receiving specialised treatment, with a disability certificate, long-term unemployed, as well as those with specialised education. It regularly creates new jobs and reintegrates and activates employees. The company actively combats social and labour exclusion. Equality Catering also cares about the ongoing development of the staff employed and improving their skills through participation in training and language courses.

The team is also encouraged to take care of their physical and mental health. More and more employees cycle to work and use the available bicycle racks. This year, the company has implemented a Benefit System programme that includes Multisport and Multilife cards, which enable employees to benefit from the support of psychologists, trainers, nutritionists and sports activities.

The entire team is committed to ensuring that social companies such as Equality Catering are perceived as providing very good quality services whose ideas are in line with the goals of sustainable development. By definition, social economy entities are important in the context of community economic and service activities, fair trade and economic development. For this reason, it is particularly important to constantly cooperate with private enterprises and invest resources in the social capital of social economy entities and marginalised and excluded people in accordance with the principles of sustainable development.

One of the most important functions of the social economy is to counteract social exclusion. Similarly, one of the elements of the SDGs is the achievement of inclusive growth targets. Significantly, private entrepreneurs who want to act in accordance with the principles of sustainable development are increasingly willing to cooperate with social companies, as is in line with their CSR activities. By choosing services provided by companies such as ours, entrepreneurs are investing in social capital, in marginalised and excluded people. These people are given a chance to work, and we create more jobs as a result.

### **Managing and organising work is a real challenge. Which of your daily tasks is the most challenging?**



There are many challenges and high costs involved in running a business. In the case of a social company, the situation is even more complicated. **Currently, our company employs 29 people, of whom as many as 20 are at risk of exclusion.** We have to reckon with more frequent absences from work by people who are ill. This is why **teamwork** is of great significance in our case. When one person from a section is on leave, then another must come in as a substitute. We have accepted orders, customers are waiting for the services they have ordered and it is difficult to cancel any order, let alone reschedule it. Fortunately, we have been operating in the market since 2014 and know quite well how to handle such situations. An important aspect is the proper balancing of the team, teamwork, division into appropriate sections and, above all, good **communication between employees**. It is no less challenging to ensure continuity in orders and thus liquidity. The aim of our social enterprise is not to make a profit, however, in order to be able to create new jobs, we must have the means to do so. People are at the core of our agenda.

### **And what is your strategy in the area of catering itself, working with suppliers and ongoing operations?**

Equality Catering's operating strategy is largely based on abandoning disposable packaging in favour of reusable dishes and containers. Glassware, ceramic plates and crockery for coffee services are a staple of modern services. If the customer opts for disposable packaging, there are biodegradable containers and cutlery **made from biopaper, corn, bran or oat pomace**. They also come in handy when food is left over after events. Guests can pack anything they fancy and take it home. The remaining food, which is suitable for further consumption and has not been eaten, is sent to **Krakow's community fridges**. Drinks served during meetings and conferences are placed in glass carafes and dispensers. In this way, beverage bottles are reduced. Equality Catering is located in the heart of the city. It can be easily reached using **public transportation**. Individual customers are increasingly opting for self-collection of orders thus reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. The fleet of cars was recently supplied with the first **hybrid car**. More will certainly follow in future years.

The supply chain encompasses the order fulfilment process holistically, starting with the creation of the menu, ordering the goods, preparing the dishes and then delivering them to the customer or preparing them for personal collection. It is a network of connections from source to end user, which is built by entrepreneurs and suppliers who supply the final links. Equality Catering tries to use **local farmers, farms and suppliers** as much as possible, especially when it comes to fresh vegetables, dairy and meat products. In this way, the need for long-distance transportation is reduced and the local market is strengthened. If the menu chosen by customers allows it, catering mainly uses seasonal products available in the immediate area. Products that deviate in shape, size or appearance from what is considered optimal are not discarded. Chefs respect available products and do not allow food to go to waste. A **flexible supply chain** increases the ability to adapt operations to changes in the foodservice market.

### **Do you have any certifications or are you interested in obtaining a certification for your company in sustainable operations?**

At the moment, Equality Catering does not have any certifications in sustainable operations.



The company realises that it is important and does not rule out that it will want to obtain this certification in the future. The certificate unquestionably verifies and confirms the activities carried out, but for the moment our activities focus on the practical dimension of sustainability in the context of the social economy.

### **Do customers expect your company to provide sustainable solutions / have certifications?**

As of today, clients do not expect us to have certificates. They are interested in specific and practical solutions for business operations. They expect **environmentally friendly and sustainable** solutions. Catering clients pay special attention to the social nature of the company. They appreciate the fact that Equality Catering employs people after mental crises, giving them a chance for a fresh start and professional development. This form of enterprise fits perfectly with their **CSR activities**. Companies also put a strong emphasis on using reusable catering utensils, abandoning plastic bottles altogether and increasingly opt for vegetarian menus. All order arrangements are made remotely, and quotations are sent from electronic files that do not require printing.

### **What trends do you observe in the organisation of events / meetings recently?**

Catering was one of the industries most affected by the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic. The procurement of this period required a **new approach, openness to change and flexibility**. For safety reasons, orders were mainly fulfilled with disposable dishes and packaging. Fortunately, today the trends are quite different. Those ordering catering services pay special attention to **ecology**. They have completely abandoned plastic bottles in favour of drinks served in glass dispensers, order snacks served on ceramics, and if the situation forces them to order dishes in disposable packaging, it must be made of paper, bamboo or corn. We are also seeing a growing trend in terms of menu choices. Vegetarian dishes created with products from local suppliers are increasingly dominant. **Quality** matters, not the quantity of the menu ordered. Due to the economic situation, high inflation and rising food prices, those ordering catering services place great importance on ensuring that food does not go to waste. They don't order beyond their means, and want to donate what's left to food banks or community fridges. The **zero-waste philosophy** is noticeable. A trend that can also be seen is the **building of long-term relationships**. Satisfied customers use the services of Equality Catering regularly and systematically. They appreciate the fact that cooperation takes place with a sense of trust and a flexible and partnership approach. **Building positive and personalised experiences** is equally important. Modern-day customers appreciate cooperation based on recognising personalised needs and realising specific expectations.

### **Where do you get your knowledge and inspiration on the topic of organising sustainable meetings or corporate social responsibility?**

We look for inspiration for our activities in our immediate surroundings, but also those further afield. We observe gastronomic trends, the activities of our partners and customers. We are looking for news presented on social media, influencer profiles, trainings, networking meetings and social economy industry portals. Every day we try to develop better solutions for employing socially excluded people. Our services are used by residents of Krakow as well as visitors to our



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city. For this reason, to the best of our ability, we take care of the environment and ecology. If guests are to visit us, the environment should encourage them to do so. Sustainability, clean air and socially engaged companies are must-haves today.

### **Catering Equality - Bio**

Our social catering company has been offering services in Krakow since 2014. It works for the professional reintegration of socially excluded people to rebuild and sustain their ability to work independently. The strengths of employees with mental illnesses who become professionally activated are combined with qualified managers in charge of the entrepreneurial department, professional chefs, as well as those involved in marketing activities. Equality Catering handles training, conferences, and banquets. It caters for receptions, corporate meetings and outdoor events. It provides services at its premises and in Krakow. Its offer is addressed to individual customers, as well as institutional clients.