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Eco Talent 2013 as a modern way to educate and promote eco-entrepreneurship amongst students and alumni : (case study)

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ECO TALENT 2013 AS A MODERN WAY TO EDUCATE AND PROMOTE
ECO-ENTREPRENEURSHIP AMONGST STUDENTS AND ALUMNI (CASE STUDY)

Summary

Eco Talent 2013 is the Project organised by Amber Eco Ltd. in Katowice in cooperation with Katowice School of Economics (GWSH) the main goal is to promote innovative pro-ecological ideas in business, and increasing the environmental management issues among students and alumni of Polish universities. They have a chance to implement and set up their own companies in cooperation with experienced businessmen, by presenting their ideas during the Eco Talent 2013 Project. The article presents the results of surveys conducted by the author, who is Project Manager of Eco Talent 2013.

Keywords: eco-entrepreneurship, ecology, sustainable marketing, project management, case study

Introduction

The contemporary world and especially the global economy and politics focuses on sustainable development issues, that influence everyday life of people worldwide. Recently it became even more important to promote amongst individual consumers the ideas of pro-ecological attitudes, developing their greenness and educate to implement the rules of sustainable development in practice. Nowadays both companies and individual consumers care more about their environment and the ways how we use the resources and reuse them than it used to be. The main ideas of ecological attitudes are not recent – in 1971 B.Commoner articulated four

¹ Katedra Zarządzania i Marketingu.

laws of ecology including the first one that everything is connected to everything else – the ecosphere sustains people and everything they do (Commoner 1979, p.7). This statement gives the background for all the contemporary efforts put by producers, suppliers, governments and individual consumers who care about the environmental development in a sustainable way. But nowadays the consumers ecological awareness has grown to the level that its importance is a key factor for companies marketing strategies (ICG 2009). Even though in 2000 the research showed that generally environmental awareness of Polish society is low – only 18% of Poles found the need of preserving the balance in nature as important and just 22% of society understood environmental issues (Grodzińska-Jurczak 2000, p. 235). Ten years later it occurred that awareness has grown and it is much better, but still a lot can be done in sustainable development education. Environmental sustainability is the ongoing preservation of essential ecosystems and their functions, but it is not only about the environmental sustainability that consumers and producers should care about. The economic sustainability is also a must for human welfare. The economic sustainability is defined as the ongoing ability of the economic system to provide for all human needs (Martin, Schouten, 2012, p. 14). The global economy has the greatest impact on both the social and natural environment.

The very important factor for sustainable development is the consumers' greenness. Sustainable marketing engages consumers meaningfully in marketing processes (Willard 2002, p. 12). Consumers stopped being just the sales targets, in many ways they became also co – marketers. Some green consumers actively influence other consumers through word-of-mouth and by social media – especially viral marketing (including forums, blogs, customer review sites and other social media like Facebook or Twitter) (Meermans 2013). Due to IT development it is very popular to share opinions and information, as well as engage in dialogue with supporters, detractors and neutrals. It helps to create the brand in a short period of time as well.

A key role of sustainable marketing is to remove as fully as possible the barriers to sustainable consumption and actually teach the consumers how to consume in a sustainable way. In order to improve ecological awareness formal and informal education is implemented on every stage of education (Lisińska-Kuśnierz 2010, p. 50). The sooner the education begins the stronger and more effective the results are. That helps also in developing and implementing at companies better marketing strategies based on environmental issues, because these young people become one day the owners or employees. The knowledge and understanding, as well as carefulness about environment will bring the benefit for all society in the future.

1. Eco-Talent 2013 as a way of developing eco-entrepreneurship

To fulfill that goal Amber Eco Ltd. in Katowice that is a company dealing with environmental management, helps other companies to prepare the procedures of recycling and the environmental documentation, as well as educating the clients on environmental issues due to law changes, decided to implement the new project. Amber Eco Ltd. was founded in 2010 based on the strong business fundamentals of the previous company, as well as high experience and passion of their managers and employees. Amber Eco main goals are to promote ecological solutions, ecological working styles amongst their business clients, and above all smart waste management. The company deals with its customers mostly on waste management, trainings and workshops and building their CSR policy based on sustainable marketing and management that are the priority ideas for Amber Eco.

Ecological attitudes of consumers are as common as the ecological approach of companies, suppliers and government. That creates the new image of the sustainable market. The increase of ecological and environmental interests of potential consumers and actual purchasers influence very much the way the companies operate on the market. That was why the owner of Amber Eco Ltd. started to prepare the project that as a main goal has to influence and increase the environmental carefulness of individuals, as well as building pro-ecological attitudes in business. Especially in terms of new, young entrepreneurs who finish studies and would like to set up their own businesses using the green solutions in economy.

The Eco-Talent 2013 project was created to search and evaluate the possible new ideas of ecological solutions in business for all types of companies or individual consumers, that will serve in future entrepreneurships with ecological solutions in April 2013. It is a kind of eco-innovative solutions in business incubator. The prize for the winning idea is the financial and consulting support by the Organisers due to rules in the statutes published online (www.eco-talent.pl). Current project is addressed to Polish students and alumni only, but in the future the organizers consider spreading that idea worldwide to promote ecological solutions in business. There are two stages of the Project – the first stage is all virtual (the attendees will register their mini business plans online) – and it is the first level of evaluation for the potential winning eco-solution. This stage will have finished by the end of February 2014. Meanwhile the experts from the Board of Experts will evaluate the ideas presented online as mini business plan – these ideas that the experts find interesting, promising or worth further examination are going to take part in the second stage that begins in March 2014. The second stage is more detailed for attendees who have to prepare not only the detailed business plan but also the presentation that will be presented before the Board of Experts live. Then the experts will have the opportunity to ask detailed questions and discuss the idea with attendees and other

experts. The Board of Experts is going to choose the best idea or solution that will be supported for business purposes.

To ensure the public about the ecological idea of the Project the organizing company – Amber Eco Ltd. started the idea in April 2013 by presenting it to the other companies and institutions that are their business partners. Business companies and institutions were eager to help Amber Eco Ltd. in their project. Business Centre Club in Warsaw, Economic Chamber of Non-Ferrous Metals and Recycling in Katowice and a private Silesian university – Katowice School of Economics (GWSH) have become patrons for Eco Talent 2013. The ideas of Eco Talent were accepted and promoted amongst Katowice School of Economics students and the first pre-implementation survey was done at that university. The part of results that are presented in that report are the data collected in May 2013 amongst students of last year studies (70% of respondents) and 30% of alumni, all from Katowice School of Economics. The total amount of students who took part in the pre-survey was 109. The survey's main goal was to check the possibilities of introducing the Project on a larger scale in future and get some information on pro-ecological attitudes of students and alumni towards business and their potential future careers in business. This research was the first stage of the marketing research strategy due to introducing and implementing the Eco Talent Project in September 2013. At first the project schedule assumed that it would last from September 2013 till January 2014, but due to many emails with questions and requests of potential attendees the organisers decided to change the schedule in order to enable everyone who wants to take part such a possibility. The ideas registration will be finished by the end of February 2014. Nevertheless at the beginning of January the second research, amongst participants and student who were interested in attending the project, was conducted. It was more about the evaluation of the first stage of the project, communication with the organisers and general opinions. The amount of respondents in the second survey was 96. Both questionnaires were available online.

To keep the similar identity for both the project and the company itself the brand images were designed in the same style and are shown below. Moreover the main background for ECO in both logotypes is the leaf that symbolises the nature, green solution and trees as factors that connects together all of nature, industry and humans in a sustainable marketing strategy.

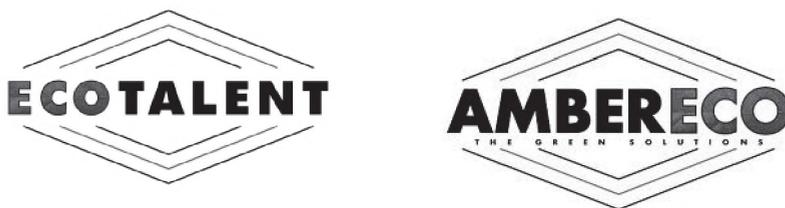


Fig. 1. The common identity of Eco Talent and Amber Eco Ltd.

Source: www.amber-eco.pl.

The idea of Eco-Talent is based mostly on sustainable marketing and management as well as vast company experience on waste management and eco-solutions that are important for entrepreneurs. The attendees – students and alumni will have a possibility to present their green inventions, ideas and modification that will improve the ecological approach for the market during both stages in the project.

2. Evaluation of Eco-Talent 2013 – the results of online survey amongst respondents

The research has been conducted in two stages so far – the first stage (before the implementation of Eco Talent 2013 webpage) was conducted in May 2013 among 109 respondents, and the second stage was conducted during the first week of January 2014 among 96 respondent. Both were based on online surveys, that were easy to access by respondents – all of them are actual students or alumni of Katowice School of Economics (GWSH). In Eco Talent 2013 there have been over 30 registered ideas so far, and over 40 universities all over Poland both public and non-public sector take part in it by promoting Eco Talent among their students and alumni.

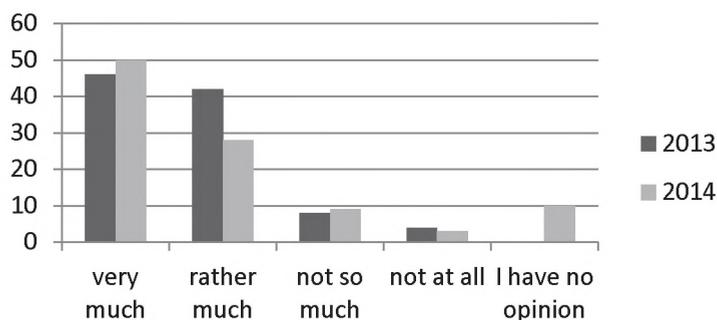


Fig. 2. Evaluation of Eco Talent idea and main goals – do you like the idea of Eco Talent? ($n_{2013}=109$, $n_{2014}=96$, %)

Source: based on own research conducted in May 2013 and January 2014.

The early stage research conducted amongst students and alumni showed that the ecological ideas are close to the young generation. The respondents were asked to answer the question if they liked the idea of Eco Talent.² The students' greenness

² One of questions in a survey at an early stage of implementing the Eco Talent Project was also about the main goals and ideas of the project; respondents have had a short description

is strong and they would like to influence the environment in a positive way by protecting the environment at the same time as evolving their business careers by taking part in Eco Talent. The second stage of a survey showed even more respondents who like the idea of Eco Talent very much, but at the same time almost 10% of them have no opinion. All respondents in the first survey were potential attendees, in the second sample 70% of respondents take part in Eco Talent, and about 30% had that intention but they decided not to take part. About 2% still considers taking part in Eco Talent and they have time to decide by the end of February 2014.

The other interesting issue about the environmental behaviour amongst the respondents is paying attention to ecological products in everyday purchase behaviour. The collected data showed (in both samples) that almost half of the respondents pay attention to pro-ecological products in their everyday consumer purchases, that means how important sustainable marketing and eco-friendly products are for contemporary young consumers. Only 8% (in May) and 6% (in January) of the respondents confirmed that they seldom pay attention to that issue. There are still some people who should be educated or influenced more by sustainable marketing communication and that goal may be achieved by Eco Talent Project as well, because some of the respondents admitted in the second survey that because of the Project they started thinking more about ecological issues.

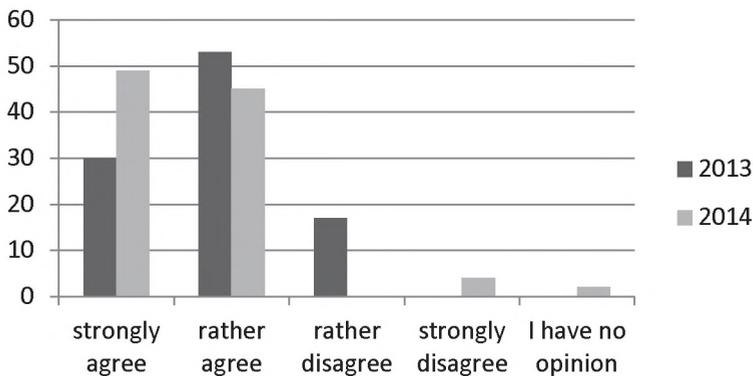


Fig. 3. Level of agreement with the statement: Protection of environment is extremely important both in business and in everyday life ($n_{2013}=109$, $n_{2014}=96$, %)

Source: based on own research conducted in May 2013 and January 2014.

This tendency is confirmed also by results shown in the next picture – the majority of respondents have admitted that they strongly or rather agree with that.

that was available also online with the rules of taking part in the project; the second survey was collected after implementation so the second sample group had complete and more detailed information on that issue.

The strong attitude towards pro-ecological behaviour in that group confirms the general tendency of young generation for carefulness in sustainable economy, marketing and communication with the market. None of the respondents has admitted that environment protection is not important (in May), but there were a few respondents that admitted that in second survey.

The last issue that is extremely important from evaluation of Eco Talent marketing strategy is the perception of the webpage and the way of registration online for attendees. The majority of respondents think that everything is very good or good in that matter – they like the webpage design (if interested to see visit www.eco-talent.pl) and the descriptions of Eco Talent rules, as well as the information given by organisers.

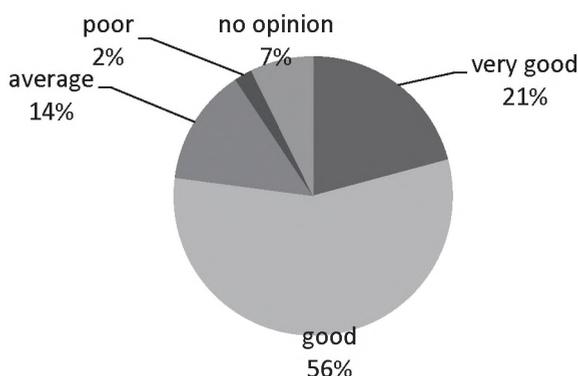


Fig. 4. Evaluation of Eco Talent webpage in January 2014 ($n_{2014}=96$)

Source: based on own research conducted in January 2014.

Some of respondents (over 15%) think that it could be improved, but it is a matter of taste on one hand and on the other hand some of that groups mentioned that simplicity of the webpage for the Eco Talent purposes is enough. They would recommend more sophisticated webpage design for later promotion and education in general issues on environmental protection and sustainable development.

The respondents had more questions in the survey (both stages), but the most interesting was the open question in the second survey where they could give their opinions on advantages for Eco Talent Project. Below there are some of them:

- Eco Talent is my chance for setting up the company with cooperation of business experts,
- The innovativeness of the Eco Talent idea (never heard about something similar),
- Possibility of showing how creative I am and evaluation of my ideas by experts on ecology and management,

- The idea of eco-company that can be set up for all the society (local community will have the direct benefits, but there are also global benefits in a long term),
- It's challenging, it's innovative, it's interesting,
- The idea of Eco Talent itself.

To sum up the research conducted both in May and in January, as well as general ideas that promote pro-ecological entrepreneurship amongst young students it must be said that they are important for developing the eco-entrepreneurship and sustainable marketing concepts. Young people expect not only the knowledge, but as well the shared experience on sustainable development and pro-ecological entrepreneurship.

Conclusions

Eco Talent as a project for education and promotion of eco-entrepreneurship is liked by the majority of respondents both at the beginning, before it was implemented, and currently while the potential attendees have still the chance to register their eco-friendly ideas online and take part in Eco Talent 2013. It is very important for students and alumni that Eco Talent is focused on young people who have interesting ideas and looking for support from companies to run their own business as a partnership. It gives them the opportunity to check their application in a real business environment – all the experts are businesspeople who have run their companies for many years, so they have the right experience and business intuition. Eco Talent should be continued and maybe new projects should be introduced for that and other segments of the labour market to spread the ecological attitudes and sustainable economy ideas amongst different segments of people – consumers, companies, suppliers and institutions. The second stage of Eco Talent is going to take place in Warsaw and Katowice and after that the third stage of surveys (after project) is going to be conducted. At last it is worth mentioning that also business sector is very interested in progress of Eco Talent and its next editions.

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ECO TALENT 2013 JAKO NOWOCZESNY SPOSÓB NA EDUKACJĘ I PROMOCJĘ EKO-PRZEDSIĘBIORCZOŚCI WŚRÓD STUDENTÓW ORAZ ABSOLWENTÓW (STUDIUM PRZYPADKU)

Streszczenie

Projekt Eco Talent realizowany jest od 2013 r. i na celu promocję oraz edukację proekologiczną młodych ludzi poprzez pobudzenie ich do działań przedsiębiorczych skoncentrowanych na ochronie środowiska naturalnego. Dzięki zgłoszeniu i prezentacji swoich pomysłów biznesowych w zakresie innowacyjnych rozwiązań proekologicznych przed Radą Ekspertów studenci i absolwenci mają szansę na uruchomienie własnej działalności gospodarczej. Projekt jest w fazie realizacji i cieszy się dużym zainteresowaniem. Artykuł przedstawia wyniki badań przeprowadzonych przez Autorkę, która jest Project Managerem Eco Talent 2013.

Słowa kluczowe: eko-przedsiębiorczość, ekologia, marketing zrównoważony zarządzanie projektem, studium przypadku

Tłumaczenie Anna Sobczyk-Kolbuch