



Planting Our Future

Linking communities and strengthening
resilience of rural and urban places

Experiences from Central Europe

Kraków – Brno – Banská Bystrica – Bielsko-Biała / Wilkowie
2025

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PART I

Introduction | Foreword

In the context of today's climate challenge, trees are not just positive, universal symbols, but act as powerful tools for mitigating the effects of climate change. Trees are rooted in our culture, art and history, and are witnesses of the past, present and the future. They connect people and communities, they build bridges among generations, bring common value and restore faith in democracy, solidarity and humanity. They are the backbone of a sustainable future.

The Planting Our Future initiative engages people in the planting and care of trees, which are symbols of an unbreakable bond between people and nature. The goal is to enhance the resilience of landscapes and cities to the impacts of climate change through community tree planting and follow-up care as well as returning the trees to the settlements and the open countryside, wherever they are needed, especially localities where functional green infrastructure is missing or fragmented. An important part of the approach of Planting Our Future is empowering civil society and democratic values – by supporting local communities represented by active municipalities, schools, civic associations etc. The initiative includes educational and demonstration activities to raise awareness of the importance of trees in one's homeland. In the cultural landscape of Central Europe each piece of land belongs to somebody, whether it is citizens, farmers, local governments, state institutions or private companies. That is why the Planting Our Future initiative is a multi-stakeholder project connecting a broad range of partners around a common vision.

Community tree plantings have proven to be a highly effective tool for strengthening community life, people's connections to the places they live, and their relationship with the landscape and the earth, with positive impacts on the environment. The climate has always changed over time, but this time it is clear from climate data that human activity is the main contributor to global warming. For this reason, it is necessary to focus on eliminating the root cause, i.e. reducing the concentration of CO₂ and other greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. This is a global problem that will require global action and cooperation of each and everyone of us.

The work does not end with planting trees. On the contrary, in order for newly-planted trees to survive, we must regularly water them and in general provide them with professional maintenance and care. It is all the more important to select the right tree species and the right place for planting them at the beginning of the planning process and also to prepare responsibly for the subsequent care of the planted trees.

We believe that tree planting and tree care is a concrete and useful way towards a sustainable future: making the landscape more beautiful and healthy, more varied and, above all, more resilient to the impacts of climate change. Each tree affects the microclimate, absorbs carbon from the atmosphere and retains water. Each tree creates living conditions for other plants, animals, fungi and microorganisms. Every tree is part of an ecosystem important for our future.

These voluntary engagement projects also represent effective and viable models for corporate social responsibility in the areas of environmental protection, landscape care, and addressing climate change on the local level. Involvement of a business partner in community tree plantings demonstrates commitment to sustainability and environmental protection, enhances brand image and builds goodwill among customers and stakeholders. Personal involvement in tree-planting encourages employees to participate in meaningful volunteer activities, strengthens teamwork by promoting shared social responsibility and increases job satisfaction and retention among employees who value sustainability.

Community-based planting trees initiatives are already underway in Czechia, Slovakia and Poland, including the Czech Planting for the Future (Sázíme budoucnost) by Nadace Partnerství, the Slovak Planting the Future (Sadíme budúcnosť) by Nadácia Ekopolis and the Polish Tree Day (Święto Drzewa), an ecological education program focusing on environment and climate protection – supported by planting and protecting trees and shrubs initiated by Klub Gaja over 20 years ago (and supported by Fundusz Partnerstwa). All of these programs required a collective effort in order to protect the environment, support community projects over the long term and raise people's appreciation and understanding of how to face up to the climate crisis. These Initiatives have so far involved thousands of people in the planning, planting and subsequent care of trees, which are symbols of harmony between people and nature.

This publication is a comparative study of the programs and methodologies implemented in Czechia, Slovakia and Poland. It defines the common vision and principles of the Planting Our Future initiative and is a guideline on the implementation strategy of this program in Central Europe, but also on the broader European level.

Miroslav Kunderata, Peter Medved', Jacek Bożek, Dominika Zaręba

PART II

Planting Our Future programs in Czechia, Slovakia and Poland – comparing models & methodologies

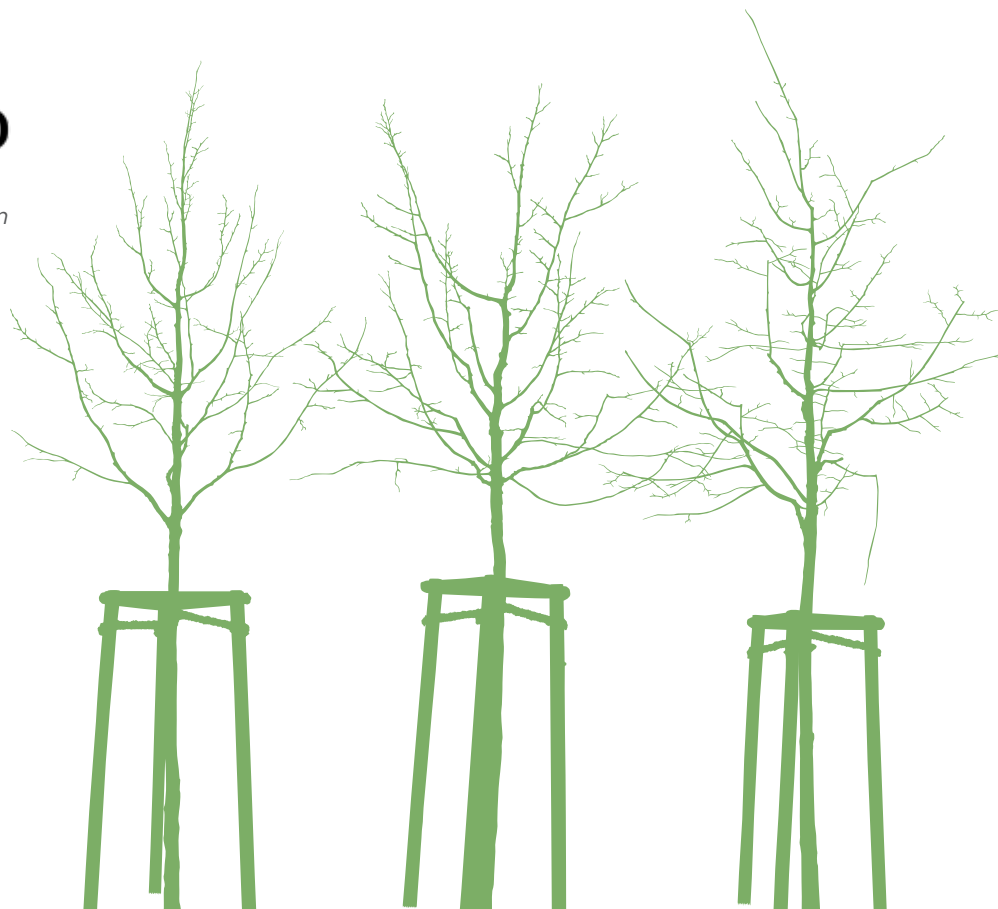
1. Planting for the Future (Czech Republic)

1.1 Background and history

Planting for the Future (in Czech: Sázíme budoucnost) is an initiative founded and coordinated by the **Environmental Partnership Foundation (Nadace Partnerství)**. The goal of the initiative is to **strengthen the resilience of the Czech urban and rural landscape** to the impacts of climate change. We aim to achieve this primarily by **planting trees in non-forested zones**. In the context of today's climate challenges, trees are not just positive symbols. They are an effective tool for mitigating the effects of climate change.



Logo of the Sázíme budoucnost program



Case study: Trees of Liberty 1918-2018 campaign (Stromy Svobody)

**STROMY
SVOBODY**
1918
2018

Logo of the
Stromy Svobody

The origins of Planting for the Future can be traced back to the success of the **Trees of Liberty** campaign, which was the Environmental Partnership Foundation's initiative on the occasion of the 100 year anniversary celebrations of the founding of Czechoslovakia. While searching for trees still standing which witnessed that historic year and reliving the powerful stories of our ancestors who had planted them, we experienced an outpouring of support and love of the people for their community and its trees.



The decisive impulse for setting up the Planting for the Future Program was the prevailing atmosphere at the planting of one hundred linden trees by over five hundred volunteers along the **Freedom Avenue near Říp** (a historically important Czech hill). This memorable event took place exactly on the 100th anniversary of the founding of Czechoslovakia on Saturday, November 17, 2018.

"There were students, families, scouts, bankers, business executives, politicians, and many local residents involved. I had an immense desire and need to take this human energy and redirect it into a future project. I thought that if every citizen of the Czech Republic would plant a tree, these 10 million new trees could help improve the health of our landscape, the climate of our cities and spread positivity among the people involved," recalls Miroslav Kundera, the co-founder of the Environmental Partnership Foundation and founder of the Planting for the Future initiative.

For more information about the Trees of Liberty campaign, please visit: www.stromysvobody.cz

We began thinking about how to convert this extremely positive energy centered around the Trees of Liberty campaign that was ultimately associated with the past into an initiative focused on the future.

And so we decided to find out if it would be possible to make this happen. A turning point was when the Minister of the Environment of the Czech Republic on hearing more became so enthused by the concept that he decided the Ministry of the Environment would back it. Before the launch of the project, a series of strategic meetings were held with experts, representatives of municipalities and state institutions to **verify the feasibility of our endeavor to plant 10 million trees** across the landscape (with the exception of forests), and the conditions under which it could be achieved.

Our approach from the outset has been that **we did not want to nor could we be the only ones working to reach this lofty goal**. Once we gained the support from the Ministry of the Environment and active mayors, teachers, associations, green-minded businesses, esteemed experts and passionate enthusiasts were behind us, the path was clear. Together we could not fail.

Our aim is to **connect everyone who is already involved in planting trees, and help others who want to get involved** but haven't figured out how and where. We also know that, especially with regard to drought, it is necessary to take long-term care of trees, which must be guaranteed as part and parcel of these initiatives.



Goals of the Sázíme budoucnost program

1.2 Description of the partnership

The Planting for the Future initiative was founded and is coordinated by the Environmental Partnership Foundation. Through this initiative, the Foundation achieves its mission by fostering partnerships and enhancing the ability of individuals and communities to actively engage in environmental stewardship. **The Ministry of the Environment of the Czech Republic** is one of the co-founders of Planting for the Future. It actively supports our efforts throughout the initiative and is spearheading the Legislative Group of the initiative.

Other partners of the initiative:

- ▶ **Financial partners of the initiative** contribute to the fulfillment of the goals and development of the Planting for the Future project, and thus enable us to turn our ideas into actions.
- ▶ **Financial partners of the grant program** support the planting in local communities throughout the country, helping to bring life back to the Czech countryside and cities.
 - Financial partners contribute financially to a joint grant fund, from which we distribute funds in the form of grants for tree planting in open landscapes and urban areas to communities, municipalities, associations, etc., throughout the Czech Republic.
 - Depending on the donation amount, we match our corporate partners' and donors' contributions with specific planting projects, in which they can participate as volunteers.
 - The costs of one planting project in an open landscape or urban area range from approximately 1,000 to 10,000 EUR. Unlike small forest seedlings, mature tree saplings intended for planting outside the forest are expensive – approx. 80 EUR per tree. The overall price is higher given the costs of ongoing care for a period of up to 10 years and protecting the tree against damage.
 - Thanks to this support, various associations, municipalities, communities etc. are able to plant tree avenues, orchards or other areas in their communities. These trees provide natural support for the ecological stability of the area, preventing soil and wind erosion, slowing down rainfall run-off and cooling their surroundings through evaporation on hot days. They significantly increase species diversity and enable the return of small animals crucial for the restoration of surrounding agricultural land. They are the most cost-effective natural air conditioning system in a country increasingly facing overheating challenges.
- ▶ **Planting partners** help to spread the idea of the initiative, connect us with their contacts, and thus contribute to the fulfillment of individual goals.
- ▶ **Professional partners** work with us to create methodological manuals for quality tree planting and care for them, they advise us on specific topics and work in the legislative group.
- ▶ **Media partners** get us into their media space and databases, raising awareness of the initiative and its results.

1.3 Funding – Collaborating with Donors

Donors and Financial partners of the grant program contribute financially to a **grant pool, from which we allocate funds in the form of grants for tree planting**. These grants are awarded to communities, municipalities, associations and similar organizations throughout the Czech Republic. We only support plantings in open landscapes and municipalities, not in forested areas.



Based on the amount of the donation, we pair donors and financial partners with specific planting projects, where they **can participate as volunteers**.

Once a year, we organize a **planting ceremony at the Freedom Avenue** for partners and donors. The goal of the traditional planting event is to together celebrate November 17th (Freedom and Democracy Day), a public holiday in the Czech Republic commemorating the student demonstrations against Nazi occupation in 1939, and the demonstrations in 1989 that started the Velvet Revolution.



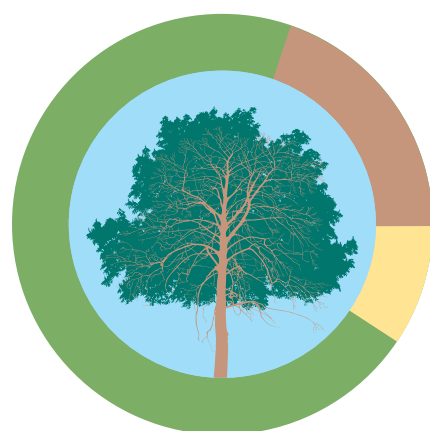
Planting of Freedom Avenue in 2022

Why we do not support tree plantings in forests

- Forest restoration is a legal obligation of the owner who manages the forest for profit, with the exception of specially designated areas such as national parks, national nature reserves, protected zones near water resources, etc. Reforestation of forest clearings will therefore take place with or without public donations because it is mandatory to afforest them.
- Forest restoration, both state-owned and private, is significantly subsidized by the state. Investments in restoration run into the billions of Czech Korunas (CZK), with hundreds of millions of saplings planted annually.
- Not every planted tree reaches adulthood. In forestry management, trees are initially densely planted, and in the following years, thinning takes place. Out of ten trees planted in close proximity to each other, only one, and at most two, are retained during the thinning process.
- Reforesting clearings after forest disasters cannot be presented as reducing the carbon footprint of a company that contributed to the plantings. The ability of our forests to absorb carbon and offset our emissions is already accounted for in the European and global commitments of the Czech Republic in climate change mitigation. Communicating the restoration of these forests as legitimate offsets is considered greenwashing.
- Greenwashing also includes all activities where marketing investments outweigh the resources used for actual plantings.

70%

purchase, planting
and treatment of trees



20%

promotion, awareness,
know-how

10%

project selection,
building partnerships

Allocation of funds in the Czech Planting for the Future program

1.4 Model – how it is organized

Role of the Environmental Partnership Foundation

- Coordinate cooperation of campaign partners, provides facilities for the coordination committee and working groups
- Provider of a database for planting records (key project output)
- Guarantee effective communication
- Provide expert advice and secure input from experts on new topics and challenges
- Administer tree planting grant program
- Collect suggestions for changes in relevant legislation

Grant time schedule

- Acceptance of donations to the foundation's account until the end of January
- Announcing a grant call for tree planting during Spring
- Acceptance of applications until the end of July
- Announcement of supported projects – mid-September
- Planting events – from October to November
- Final reports until the end of December

Main communication campaigns and activities:

- January – February: Registration of planned tree plantings
- March: Partner meetings and results of the initiative, announcement of the most active planters in the Golden Spade competition, announcement of projects as part of the spring tree planting grant call
- April: Charity Run for Trees
- May: Announcement of grant calls for fall tree plantings, communication campaign focused on tree care
- June – August: Communication campaign focused on tree care
- September: Announcement of supported projects from the fall tree planting grant call
- September – November: Community tree plantings throughout the country
- October: Announcement of grant call for maintenance of new plantings
- October – November: Planting of the Freedom Avenue
- November – December: Christmas campaign





People planting the Freedom Avenue in Czechia

1.5 Annual budget, including grant program & staff

- The total annual budget of the initiative was **8.7 million CZK** (348 000 EUR) in 2024, including the granting program.
- We disbursed small grants totaling **6.1 million CZK** (244 000 EUR) **for tree plantings** (74 projects) and **0.75 million CZK** (30 000 EUR) **for tree care** (9 projects) in 2024 as part of the Planting for the Future initiative.
- There are 4 staff members working on the project (**2.5 FTE**).

1.6 Main results

Grants for tree planting

In 2024, we allocated 6.1 million CZK for planting projects (244 000 EUR). Active mayors, schools, and associations received support not only for tree planting but also for creating grass strips and hedgerows, rehabilitating springs, and restoring field paths. These adaptation measures also contribute to our goal of increasing the resilience of landscapes and cities to the impacts of climate change.

Grants for maintenance of new plantings

Planting is just the beginning. Trees need to be properly cared for in order to stay healthy. However, as climate change progresses, ensuring this care becomes increasingly time-consuming, technically demanding, and costly. In autumn 2024, we therefore launched the first-ever grant program dedicated solely to the maintenance of newly planted trees.

Case study: Freedom Avenue 2024

On Saturday, November 9th 2024, we planted the seventh Freedom Avenue together with the President of the Czech Republic Petr Pavel, his wife Eva Pavlova and **300 volunteers**. This particular Freedom Avenue was established near the town of Broumov, known for the persecution of clergy in Czechoslovakia which took place here during the previous communist regime. In the 1950s, an internment camp for priests and monks from various orders was set up in the local Benedictine monastery. By planting this Freedom Avenue, we commemorated the past and expressed our respect for those who suffered and fought for our freedom. Volunteers planted **90 cherry, plum and rowan trees** (*Prunus avium*, *Prunus domestica* and *Sorbus*). The trees were planted on private land and with the consent of the landowner.

The goal of the traditional planting event is to commemorate and celebrate the anniversary of the Velvet Revolution, which started on November 17th, 1989. The Velvet Revolution was a nonviolent transfer of power in what was then Czechoslovakia. Popular demonstrations against the one-party government of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia included students and older dissidents. The result was the end of 41 years of one-party rule in Czechoslovakia, and the subsequent dismantling of the command economy and transformation into a parliamentary republic.



Planting the Freedom Avenue 2024 with President of the Czech Republic

Overall results of the Initiative as of 2024

More than 4,345,120 trees (8,854 planting events) and 105,788 volunteers have been registered in the database by the end of 2024.

Czechs planted the most trees along thoroughfares, with a total of 4,133 events. Solitary plantings (1,940 events), plantings in parks and forest parks (1,209 events), and in orchards (937 events) were also popular. In contrast, hedgerow plantings (443 events) and windbreaks (192 events) were less common.

By far the most active in this effort were municipalities (3,688 planting events), followed by public institutions with 1,932 events, associations and NGOs with 1,594 events, and individual citizens with 1,031 events. Companies organized 281 plantings, schools and educational institutions held 171, and farmers and landowners were responsible for hosting 156 events.

In total, more than 100,000 people participated in this countrywide endeavor. The largest number of participants joined events organized by municipalities (44,158), associations and NGOs (28,891) and companies (11,749). Public institutions recruited 8,306 volunteers, citizen groups brought together 6,208, and youth rallied 5,414. Additionally, 1,061 farmers participated in the plantings.

The most often planted were deciduous species, with oaks, lindens, and maples leading the way. The top 10 also included two conifers – pines and larches – and two fruit trees: rowans and cherries.



Invitation to the Planting of the Freedom Avenue in 2024, Broumovsko



The homepage of the main program website

Communication channels and results by the end of 2024

The main communication channels of the initiative are: the program website, social media, newsletters, direct email campaigns, partner networks, PPC ads, webinars, conferences, PR articles, etc. In 2024, Planting for the Future and Freedom Avenue were mentioned in the media a total of 233 times. This corresponds to a cumulative reach of nearly 21 million readers, viewers, listeners, and website visitors.

Planting for the Future tree map on the website

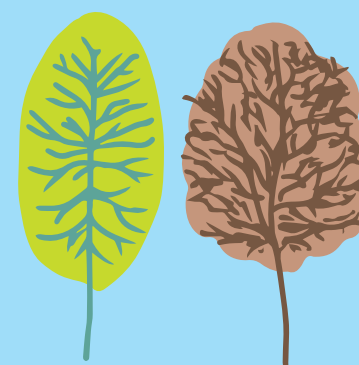
Every tree registered to our database is added to our interactive map on our website and counts towards the target of 10 million new trees in our country. (We have only been counting new trees planted outside forested areas since 2019.)

Thanks to our database we have a unique overview of the types and numbers of trees, locations, and entities supporting tree planting all across the Czech Republic, making it possible to measure the impact these collective efforts are having. The data is valuable for municipal leaders, educational institutions, and government ministries deciding on funding programs for landscape revitalization. **The interactive Sázíme budoucnost map is the only database of this scale in the Czech Republic. We contribute to the EU's commitment to plant 3 billion trees.**

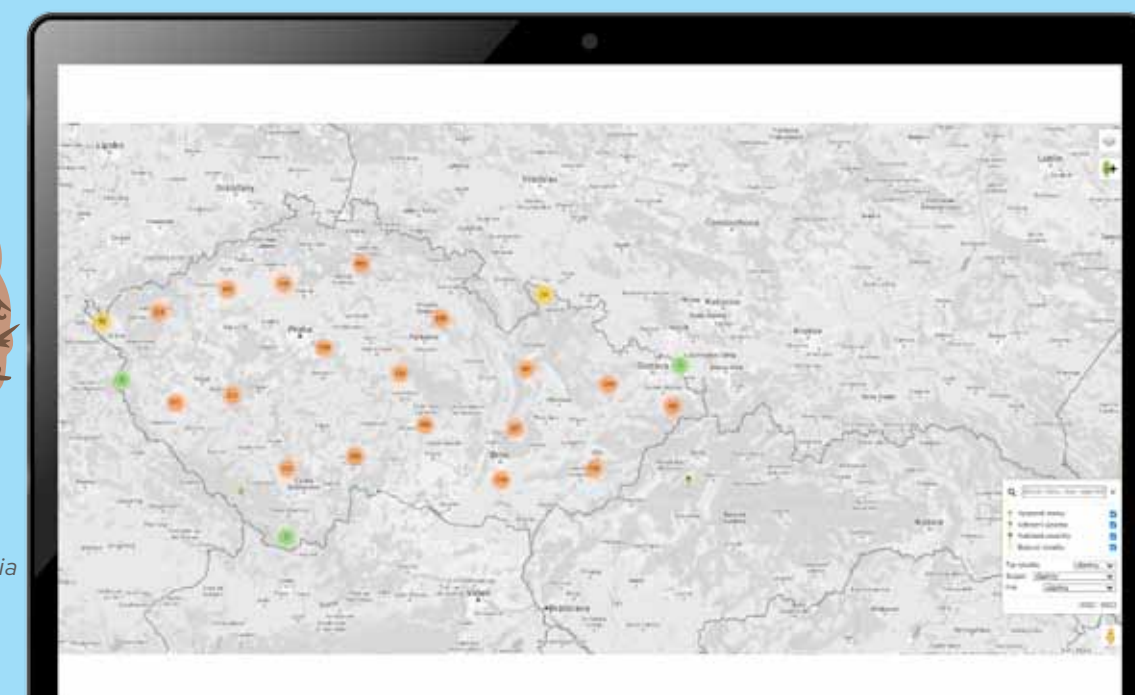
1.7 Web, social media, communications

Principles of the communication campaign

- ▶ All stakeholders are crucial to the success of the initiative: those who actively participate in planting, those who provide funding, land, trees, methodological support, material assistance, or communication support.
- ▶ The portal **www.sazimebudoucnost.cz** is designed to create the simplest possible environment for engaging all target groups.
- ▶ **Priority should be given to the collective initiative and its brand over the identity of the organizers.**
- ▶ **The initiative is strictly non-political.** However, the involvement of authorities, state institutions, and local governments is essential due to their responsibilities and competencies.



Map of plantings in Czechia



Case study: Golden Spade



Golden Spade event

We tally up trees not only in our tree counter but also when looking at the individual results of top planters in the **“Golden Spade” challenge**. The goal in this challenge is to **highlight those who have planted the most trees**. For municipalities and companies, we also show how close they are to the goal of planting one tree for every citizen or employee. In this way, we publicly **acknowledge the voluntary work** of municipalities, associations, companies, farmers, and individuals.

In this competition we exclude trees planted on the basis of a legal obligation (replacement plantings, reclamation plantings). However, **each tree has its own role to play in adapting to the changing climate**, so we include them in the total number of planted trees on our interactive map.

2. Planting for the Future (Slovakia)

2.1 Background and history

The **Planting the Future** program (in Slovak: Sadíme budúcnosť) was created in 2021 by capitalizing on long-standing activities and projects of the **Ekopolis Foundation** (Nadácia Ekopolis), which the Planting the Future program strategically followed up on and developed to a higher quality. We have been supporting tree planting and landscaping of green areas as part of dedicated business-funded programs throughout Slovakia since 2006. Responding to the growing interest of local communities in this type of support, the Ekopolis Foundation created a comprehensive program, which builds on the extensive experience of the Foundation in running successful grant programs as well as supporting tree planting initiatives in local communities. **The immediate inspiration for Planting the Future was Planting for the Future (Sázíme budoucnost), a program of the Czech Environmental Partnership Foundation in operation in the Czech Republic since 2018.**



Logo of the program Sadíme budúcnosť

The main idea of the Planting the Future program is the return of trees – functional greenery to residential environments and open landscapes where green infrastructure is missing or disrupted. The program also includes professional support in planning, planting and caring for trees, presenting examples of good practice, and raising awareness about the importance of trees in the landscape. The goal we seek to achieve and promote is not to plant a specific number of trees as is the case with the Czech initiative (10 million trees = one symbolic tree for every Czech citizen), reflecting the fact that Slovakia is a densely forested country (41% of the land is covered by forests). Planting a symbolic tree for every Slovak citizen would not only be impossible but it would also undermine the credibility of the project’s stakeholders and target groups. The program was launched with the motto: **“We plant trees where they are needed”**. This quote expresses the long-term effort and sustainability of the program; it likewise implies a difference between the Planting the Future initiative and large-scale tree plantings in forests, and emphasizes quality over quantity.



An important part of the program is the support of civic initiatives and the involvement of local communities – Planting the Future involves people in the planning, planting and subsequent care of trees, which are a symbol of togetherness among people and nature. In the spring of 2022, the initiative launched its first call for grants as part of a new program for supporting plantings in Slovakia.

Within the program, the Ekopolis Foundation also emphasizes educational, informational and demonstration activities, dissemination of examples of good practice and raising public awareness of the importance of planting suitable trees in suitable locations.

The initiative is also creating a unique database of plantings in all open, cultural landscapes except forests, presented in the form of a map available on the program landing page. At the Ekopolis Foundation, we realize and freely admit that planting trees and better greenery is not a universal way or the only way to a sustainable future. However, we do consider planting trees to be a concrete and useful way to make the landscape more beautiful, more diverse and, above all, more resilient to the consequences of climate change.



Planting event with local volunteers in Nesvady, autumn 2024

2.2 Description of the Partnership

Thanks to the Planting the Future program, the Ekopolis Foundation connects those who want to plant trees and those who have the resources to plant them.

1. The core partners of the Ekopolis Foundation are local communities, schools, local governments, civic associations and other civil society organizations as the **main recipients of grant aid**.

The Planting the Future program focuses on plantings in the cultural landscape – in residential areas and in agricultural landscapes, but not in forested areas. We support the planting of trees that best match the specific location and the required functions that the trees are to perform – local residents know the latter best. Native species are preferred over non-native, exotic species. In addition to planting individual trees, tree rows and tree-lined avenues that will provide much needed shade, suitable conditions for birds and insects, and reduce noise and dust in cities, we also want to support the planting of fruit orchards that will delight with their juicy and fragrant fruits, or green oases in housing estates that retain water, cool the air in summer and beautify the commons. In agricultural landscapes, we will add trellises, windbreaks, infiltration and shade strips that will prevent the landscape from drying out, slow down soil erosion, retain water and provide a refuge for various animals. The planting sites our core partners identify are all places where biodiversity and green infrastructure have been disturbed to a lesser or greater extent by human activity.



2. **Financial supporters of the initiative** – mainly companies that, as part of their social responsibility work, pay attention to sustainability and mitigating the impacts of their activities on the environment.

- ▶ **General partner of the initiative** – The general partner has been behind the initiative since its inception – thanks to his financial contribution, we were able to launch the initiative including all necessary actions and core communication milestones (visual identity, website, tree planting database, kick-off event), as well as handle the administration and management of the entire initiative. The general partner is continuing to support the development of the initiative in whatever way he can.
- ▶ **Financial Partners of the initiative** – this group of partners includes those who contribute to the operating costs of the initiative, for instance management and administration, communication expenses etc.
- ▶ **Financial Partners of the plantings** – financial partners who provide additional funding to support individual planting projects funded through the open grant call. The contribution of each financial planting partner is 70% direct planting support and 30% administration of the total contributed amount. The amount of the contribution depends on the donor's decision. The maximum amount of support per funder per project is 4,000 euros.



3. Our partners are also **public institutions** with environmental expertise, whose task is to create an environment conducive to implementing adaptation and mitigation measures combating climate change with a practical impact on the community and the country (for example: obtaining the endorsement of the Office of President Z. Čaputová for the initiative at its launch on October 20, 2021 or securing an institutional partnership with The Slovak Environment Agency).

However, it should be noted that as a result of the current political situation, the program does not have any strategic partnerships at the state level.

4. Last but not least, we open space for **experts and specialists** from the private sector, state, academic and research organizations, as well as non-governmental organizations, who can assist in creating recommendations, methodologies, as well as in researching effective ways to help the country. We often invite them as experts for planting events or for educational activities that we organize.



5. **Ambassadors** – well-known persons from various areas of public life who share our passion for focus of Planting the Future and who will help us spread the idea of the initiative to the general public. Famous personalities participate without any remuneration.

6. **Media partners** – an important part of the whole process is obtaining media contacts and securing coverage of the initiative by media outlets to improve brand awareness, raise awareness of the endeavor, our work and the results of our work and that of our volunteers.

6. **Others** – other entities that contribute to the development, communication and dissemination of awareness about the initiative, whether in a financial or a non-financial capacity.



Adela Vinczeová, TV and radio presenter and well-known public figure, ambassador of Sadíme budúcnosť (autumn 2022): "I absolutely support planting such trees in neighborhoods, in communities where people live, and I am grateful that people approach me about such activities. In Dolné Orešany, I planted a tree professionally for the first time and it was a great experience for me."

2.3 Funding – Collaborating with Donors

Donors and Financial partners of the grant program contribute financially into a **grant pool, from which we disburse funds in the form of grants for tree planting**. The call is open twice a year – in spring and autumn. Each donor has "designated" a location / locations they are supporting (depends on the level of their financial contribution). In exceptional cases, planting locations can have shared funding from several donors.

The Planting the Future grant program also functions as a reservoir for projects focused on tree planting, for which the Ekopolis Foundation is continuously seeking resources to support them, primarily from corporate partners and donors. Usually it is possible to finance 5-10 spring and 15-30 autumn community tree planting projects throughout Slovakia each year. After the deadline, all projects are evaluated by an expert committee and a selection of projects are directly supported from the funds that are available at the time of evaluation. We usually have a reserve list set up for other high quality projects that can end up getting support if additional funds are raised in a given calendar year. New partners can join the program at any time during the year.

What will the corporate donor gain from working with us?

- Enhancing the reputation of their environmentally responsible company
- Support for specific locations and communities
- Partnership in a unique initiative with a nationwide reach
- Their brand will become part of the Plant the Future campaign
- Opportunity to communicate relevant topics within their company's CSR activities
- Opportunity to obtain creative content for their company and products
- **Personal presence and opportunity to participate in plantings directly in the field as volunteers, together with local residents**



Structure of Partners and Donors of the program

2.4 Model – how it is organized

A Grant call

- ▶ Before each new grant round opens, the Grant Program Propositions are published, which include all the details and conditions for obtaining a grant, as well as the evaluation criteria.
- ▶ Grant applications can be submitted by individuals as an informal civic initiative (in this case, 2 persons responsible for implementing the project and reconciling the grant must be listed) as well as by registered non-governmental organizations (civic associations, non-profit organizations, foundations, faith-based organizations, homeowners' associations, etc.), kindergartens, primary and secondary schools, school organizations, leisure centers and community centers, local governments and public institutions run by municipalities (preference will be given to projects implemented in partnership with one of the above-mentioned eligible applicants).
- ▶ The applicant for a grant shall submit the project in the form of an electronic application, which must include a brief summary of the project, basic information about the applicant and the location to which the project relates, a timetable of activities, a budget with specific items, and a specification of who will implement the project and how. Another important part of the application is also a description of the post-grant tree care envisioned and the responsibility for the sustainability of the project.
- ▶ Received applications are evaluated by a committee composed of experts (min. 5 people), who assess the applications according to predetermined criteria.
- ▶ **Each financial partner is assigned to a specific planting initiative which is funded by their contribution.** If the amount is insufficient and the project requires more funds, more donors may be allocated to one location, but this is more of an exception than the rule, and comes into play only in case of a larger project.
- ▶ The program does not support the planting of coniferous trees and forest plantings, nor replacement plantings pursuant to Section 48 of the Act on Nature and Landscape Protection No. 543/2002 Coll.

B Implementation of the projects

- ▶ Project implementation is planned to cover two periods – spring (March – May) and autumn (mid-October – December).
- ▶ Grantees are required to communicate all project implementation steps as well as the date of the main planting event in advance.
- ▶ The donor of the planting is invited to take part in the planting. Donors usually use these events as team building and volunteer events with their employees.
- ▶ **Representatives of the Ekopolis Foundation also participate in many planting events – they guarantee high-quality planting and offer professional assistance and support during planting for the grantees and also for volunteers. We also oversee the aftercare of the trees, which is key to the sustainability of the project.**

C Grant timeline

- December – January: open call for spring round
- February: evaluation and publication of results, contracting
- March – May: Launch of planting events, Reporting
- April – June: open call for autumn round
- July – August: evaluation and publication of results, contracting
- October – December: Launch of planting events, Reporting
- December: Final Reporting to the donors and partners

Case study: When trees connect



Photo of the project partners, donors and volunteers, Nová Bystrica - autumn 2024

Among 84 applications submitted during the autumn 2024 grant round, the selection committee chose 30 projects for funding, including the *When Trees Connect* project.

The aim was to plant fruit trees and shrubs at two locations in the Municipality of Nová Bystrica – on the cycle path and in the school grounds of the Vychylovka Primary school and kindergarten. Volunteers wanted to restore green spaces to the residential neighborhood, provide a suitable environment and also create a space for student education, relaxation and rest.

Several entities were involved in the project including the municipality of Nova Bystrica, the elementary school with a kindergarten in Vychylovka, the elementary school with a kindergarten in Nová Bystrica, and three project donors. The media were also invited to the planting ceremony, thanks to which there was good TV coverage and reporting on the event. The entire planting was led by planting expert Robert Podoba and was also attended by representatives of the project supported by the Visegrad Fund.

The total amount of grant was 3,600 EUR and 23 trees in total were planted (species: *Sorbus aucuparia 'Edulis'*, *Cerasus*, *Pyrus*, *Prunus*, *Prunus domestica* subsp. *syriaca*, *Malus domestica*) along with 14 shrubs (species: *Cornus mas Lutea*, *Aronia nigra*, *Amelanchier*, *Hylocomium*, *Corylus*, *Lonicera xylosteum*, *Ribes nigrum* *Titania a Rovada*) with the help of approximately 50 volunteers.

2.5 Annual budget, including grant program and staff

In 2021, the program was launched with a budget of 132,516 EUR, allocating 94,335 EUR for grants and the rest for management costs. Initially, the foundation built its fundraising on already existing relationships, expanding over time to include new donors and corporate supporters. Over the years, the average budget has increased incrementally, reaching the following figures in 2024:

- Annual budget: 164,498.83 EUR.
- Total grant amount disbursed: Support for 41 projects worth a total of 96,870 EUR.
- Staff engaged: 2 persons – program manager and field operations coordinator.

2.6 Main results (as of 2024)

The Planting the Future initiative has to date supported 93 locations, where more than 4,000 active volunteers have planted 6,431 trees in cultivated and open landscapes (with the exception of forests). So far, 236,250 EUR have been invested in tree plantings.



Staff of Sadíme budúcnosť at the tree planting event in Vel'ký Lél – autumn 2024

2024

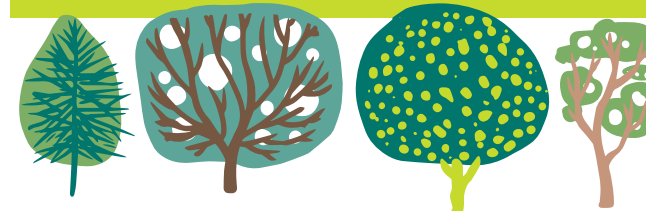
In 2024, we supported a total of 41 projects worth 96,870 EUR.

The majority of trees planted were specifically intended to create orchards, mainly composed of native tree species such as apple, pear, and cherry trees. This was followed by linear plantings including avenues, and two windbreaks were also added. Lindens, oaks, maples, bird cherries, hawthorns or hornbeams were the most common species planted.

In 2024, the majority of projects supported were run by non-profit organizations (17), followed by local governments – cities as well as municipalities (12). Next were schools and kindergartens (3) and informal civic initiatives led by individual citizens (4) and last but not least, other societies and associations (5).

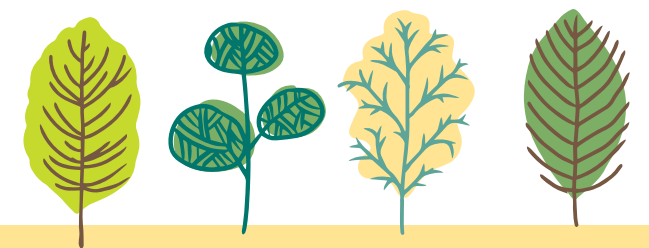
Spring round:

- 11 supported projects initiated and run by local communities, 4 donors
- **653 trees planted**, of which 508 are native species, specific to the region and locality
- 549 volunteers involved
- 2,594 volunteer hours worked
- 38,876 square meters landscaped and more than 2,950 meters of trees planted
- 27,800 EUR disbursed for planting projects



Autumn round:

- 30 supported projects of local communities, 13 donors
- **1,670 trees planted**, of which 1,112 are native species, specific to the region and locality
- 1,081 volunteers involved
- 4,484 volunteer hours worked
- 54,628 square meters landscaped and more than 3,098 meters of trees planted
- 71,850 EUR disbursed for projects



Planting event in Partizánske with elementary school students pitching in, spring 2023



2.7 Web, social media, communications

Communication is an integral part of the program's operations. The Planting the Future brand is apolitical and must not be used for party political gain. Entities involved in the Planting the Future initiative agree to spread and preserve the brand's reputation and commit themselves not to devote more resources and efforts to presenting a green approach than to actually fulfilling the very essence of the initiative.

Communication with grantees

- ▶ It is very important to establish transparent and open communication with grant applicants and later with supported grantees from the very beginning.
- ▶ Grantees are a direct participant for us not only in the implementation of the project, but also in its communications – **thanks to them we have direct contacts with local communities, municipalities and they open doors for further cooperation.** Also, thanks to them and their work, awareness of the initiative spreads. Last but not least, thanks to the work of volunteers on the project, **we have access to content that we use for communication and marketing** – photos, videos, etc. Supported projects also serve as examples of good practice that can inspire the further development of green solutions in Slovakia.
- ▶ A **Final Report** must be prepared for each project, where we collect data from the projects we support – the number and types of trees planted, the number of volunteers involved, the number of hours worked, the size of the area treated, that we also use as a communication material – for reporting to donors and also to public.
- ▶ **The Final Report also includes the registration of the planting in the planting database, which is part of the website.**
- ▶ Main tools for communications with grantees: e-mails, phone calls, newsletters, website, e-grant system, social media.



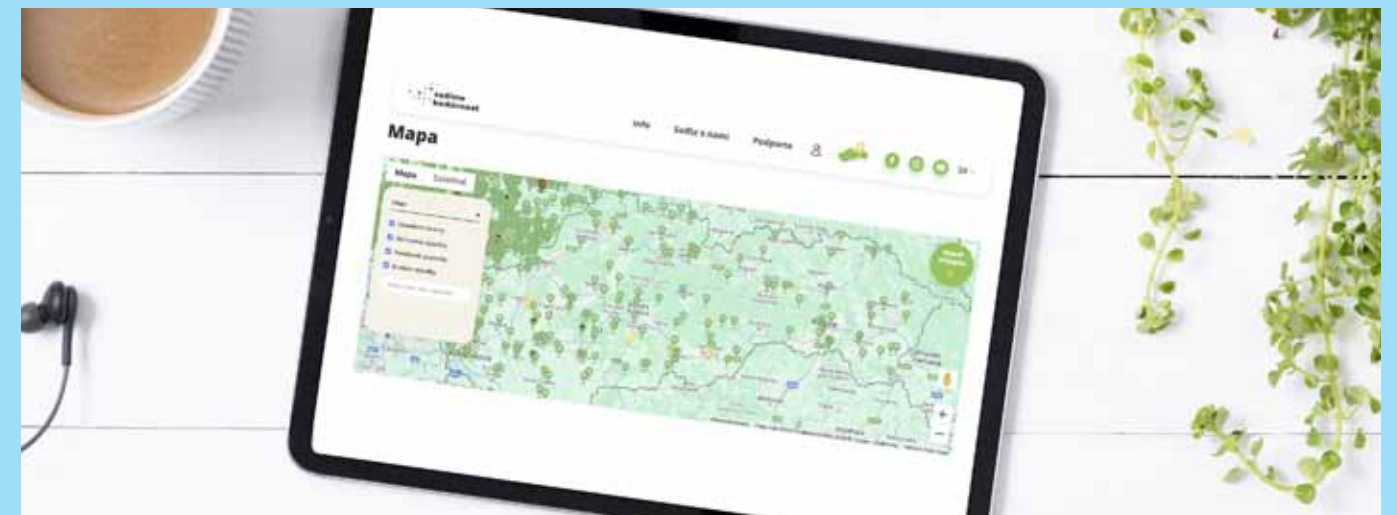
Invitation for planting event in 2024



Communication

Every year we draft an internal document known as the annual communication schedule. It allows us to have a basic communication line and we continuously update and supplement it with ad hoc activities throughout the year.

Communication channels serve their respective audiences, collectively forming a comprehensive communication mix. Thanks to this, we can reach a wide range of target groups, as well as the general and professional public.

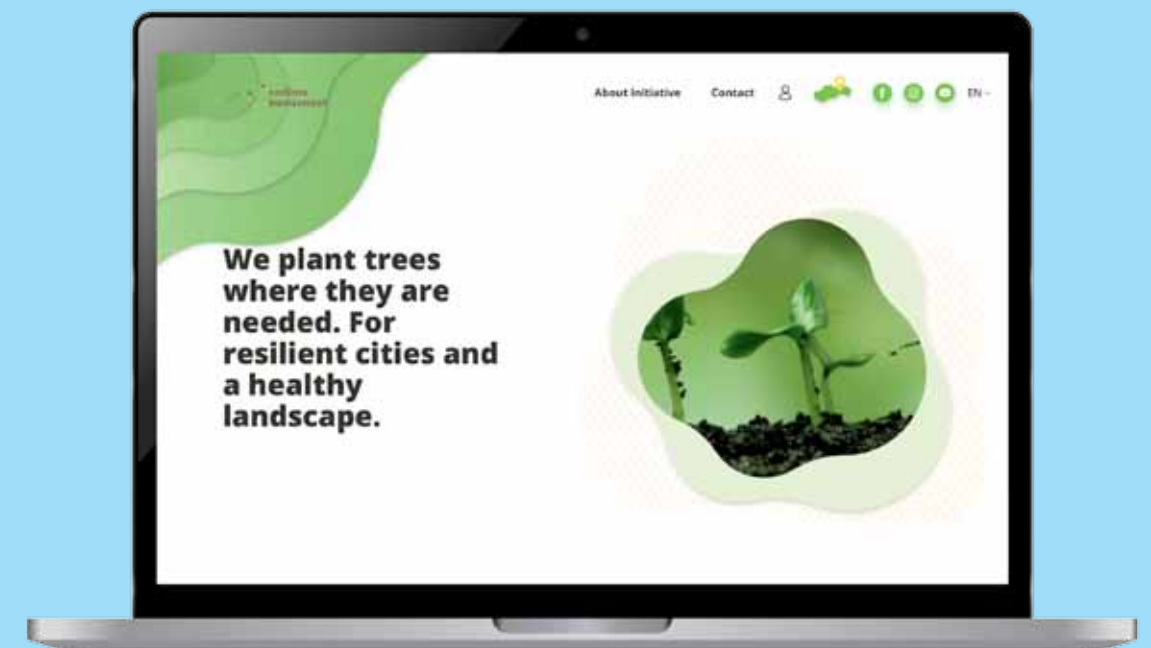


Map of Slovakia showing tree plantings supported within the framework of the Sadíme budúcnosť programme and other plantings supported by third parties. This map is integrated with the Czech map of Sázíme budoucnost program.

Communication channels:

1. Website with unique database

The first and most important channel was the program website **www.sadimebuducnost.sk**, which includes a **planting database** and which helps all interested parties with planning, professional advice or methodology for meaningful plantings, finding land and obtaining funding through open grant rounds.



Program's webpage - English version

The database serves to register tree plantings in any terrain (except forests) throughout Slovakia, including those not funded by the initiative or Ekopolis Foundation (projects funded by the initiative or our Foundation are obliged to register their plantings). Included in the database is a map showing the details of individual plantings. We also contribute to the EU's commitment to plant 3 billion trees.

2. Social Media

- Facebook (including paid ads twice a year)
- Instagram (including paid ads twice a year)
- Youtube
- LinkedIn

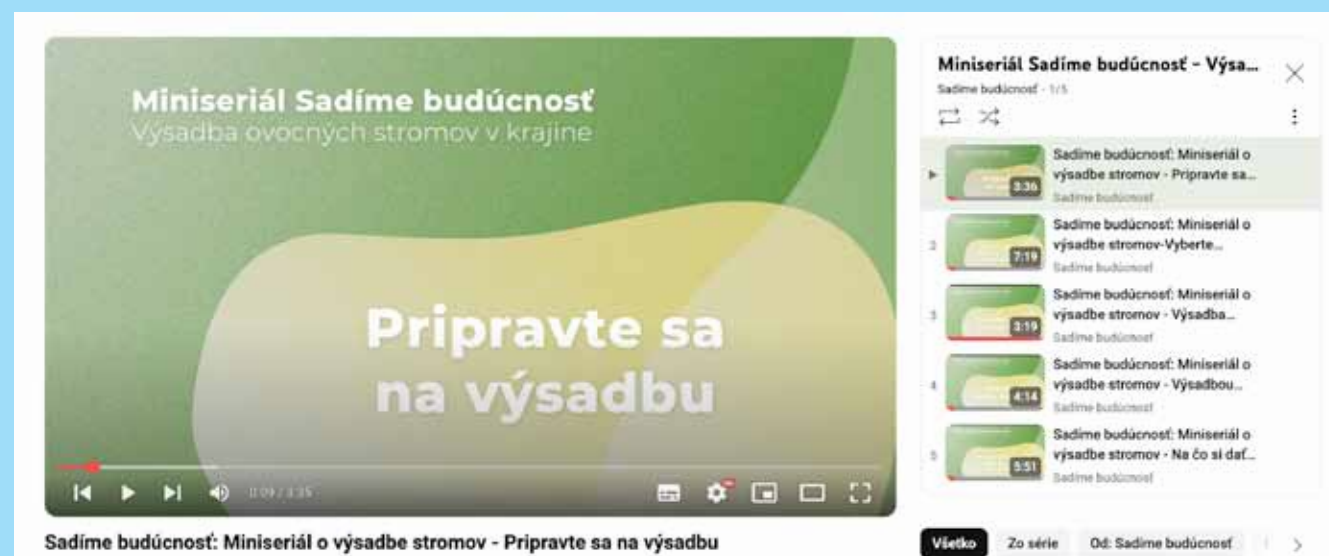
3. Media contact list

- own media contact list
- press releases and media info, some PR articles

4. Events / Campaigns

► Online:

- Online moderated discussions – the format of moderated online presentations of examples of good practice is of great help to people who want to plant trees and take care of them. Together with invited guests, who are experts on relevant topics to the planting campaign, our Foundation successively presents various aspects of what constitutes a “good project”. The public has the opportunity to join the discussion live and ask questions. The meetings are streamed online on the Foundation's Facebook page and at the same time a recording is made of them, which is publicly accessible.
- Series of instruction videos for tree-planting activists focused on good practice when planting trees in urban environments and open agricultural landscapes.
- Fundraising campaign, Campaign for assignation of 2% of tax, Christmas campaign, introducing of the supported projects



Youtube channel of Sadíme budúcnosť – Series of instruction videos for tree-planting enthusiasts focused on good practice.

► Offline:

- Launching events including planting events in local communities
- Participation in professional discussions, panels, lectures or seminars organized by other entities

5. Newsletter

- Nadácia Ekopolis newsletter: around 1500 emails
- Sadíme budúcnosť newsletter: more than 300 emails

6. Publications

On the website, we publish existing publications with professional content that we want to disseminate among people. These are mainly professional publications on the correct planting of trees and the care of planted trees – **The technical side of planting and subsequent care.**



A snapshot from a tree planting event in Dolné Orešany. As part of the program, we have a database of photos that we use to promote the program and communicate important events.

3. Tree Day Program (Poland)

3.1 Short background and history

The Tree Day program (in Polish: Święto Drzewa) is an environmental education program initiated by the **Klub Gaja** (Gaja Klub) on **October 10th, 2003**, that addresses environmental and climate protection through real action with tangible outcomes: planting and protecting trees, establishing community gardens, squares and parks, taking care of old trees, collecting waste paper, organizing various activities for trees and around trees, including those combining ecology and art.



Logo of the initiative

To date the editions of the program were organized by Klub Gaja under various slogans, e.g., “Tree of Freedom” in 2014 (on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of Poland winning its freedom; “We read to trees” in 2015 (connections between nature and literature); “Trees – connecting generations” in 2024 (intergenerational dialogue). We also prepare educational kits for program participants, e.g. posters, brochures, reports, lesson plans, outdoor games, animations and radio podcasts.

An important activity within the scope of the Tree Day program is a campaign to plant trees and shrubs to increase biodiversity, which has a clear educational and environmental dimension to it. We green the cities, we create community gardens at kindergartens and schools, we establish squares and parks (“green oases”). We talk about which plant species to choose for urban conditions and how to create friendly shelters for insects, birds and small mammals. We also plant trees and shrubs in forest areas. We try to plant biocenotic species that create a food base for wild animals and enrich the landscape, including wild pear (*Pyrus L.*) and apple (*Malus Mill*), bird cherries (*Prunus avium L.*), rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia L.*), blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa L.*) and black elderberries (*Sambucus nigra L.*).

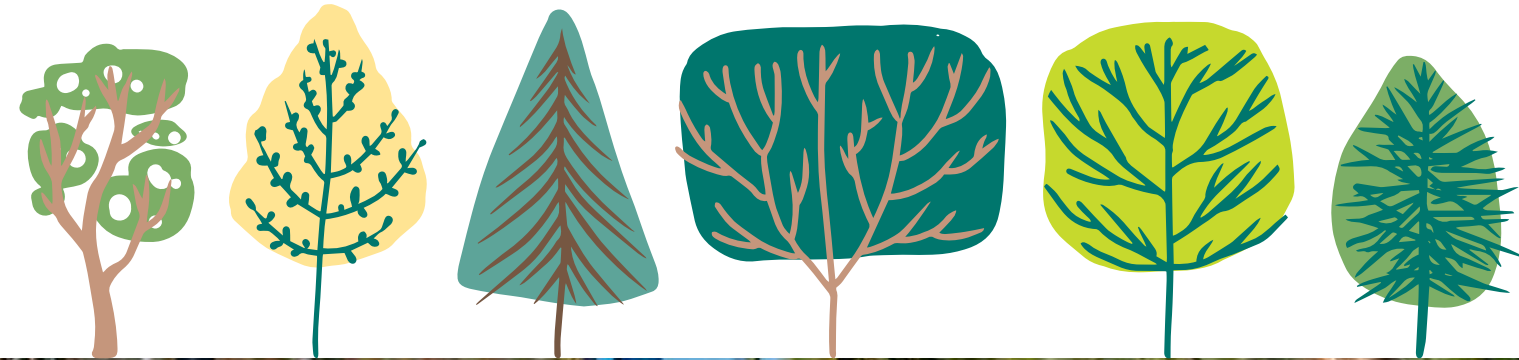
Program participants

Everyone can take part in the program – including individuals, families, groups of friends, neighbors, housing communities, kindergartens, schools, universities, libraries, community centers, art galleries, social organizations, forestry associations, religious communities, hospitals, prisons, institutions, local governments and companies.

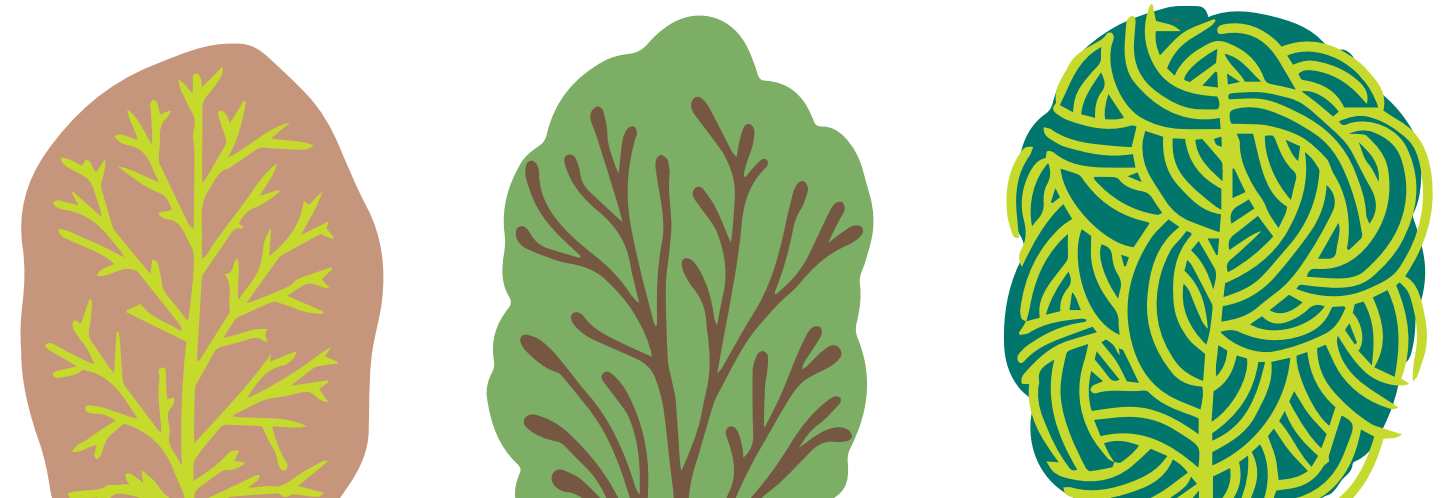
Annual nationwide program inauguration and local celebrations

Every year, on October 10th, Klub Gaja organizes the nationwide launch of the next edition of the program – the official gala takes place in Warsaw in cooperation with the City of Warsaw and under the Honorary Patronage of the President of Warsaw. Together with partners and program ambassadors hailing from the world of arts and culture, we plant trees, summarize the previous edition of the program and offer our thanks to participants and partners for their cooperation, and award the most active participants of the program.

October 10th is also an opportunity for program participants throughout the country to organize local Tree Day celebrations. Partners organize local campaigns and events, such as planting trees and shrubs, establishing gardens, green areas, parks, and launching actions to look after old trees. Many other accompanying initiatives take place on Tree Day, including: meetings, workshops, outdoor activities, trips, performances, happenings, competitions. They all have the tree as the core topic.



Tree Day 2024 in Warsaw, planting with celebrities



Case study: Who recommends Tree Day celebrations



Tree Hugger in a park in the town of Wilkowice

The Ministry of the Environment presented the Tree Day initiative as an example of good practice in education for sustainable development at the COP14 and COP19 climate conferences.

In Poznań (during COP14) at Liberty Square, Klub Gaja organized a 2 week-long public art installation called "TreeHugger Project – Defenders of Trees" in cooperation with two eco-artists/sculptors Agnieszka Gradzik and Wiktor Szostało, who created a row of willow wicker figures forming a queue to embrace the only tree growing on the square. Observers, conference participants and residents of Poznań joined the queue to the tree in the spirit of the installation's overarching theme. A similar event took place in the local park in Wilkowice, where Klub Gaja has its headquarters.

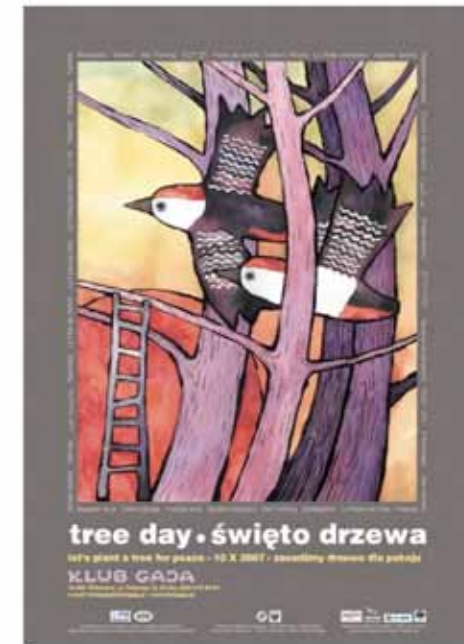
On the occasion of the COP 15 in Copenhagen, Klub Gaja distributed 10,000 certified oak seeds from the Białowieża Forest to participants and observers present at the conference, with instructions on how to plant them, under the slogan "Plant a good climate".

The program was also described by the The Institute of Civic Affairs in the publication "Civil Society Inspirer" ("Inspirator Obywatelski") as an example of good practice in the field of informal civic education.

A case study about Tree Day was included in the publication "Plant for the Planet. The Billion Trees campaign" published by the UNEP (UN Environmental Program) in 2008. See: <https://www.unep.org/resources/publication/plant-planet-billion-tree-campaign>

Trees for peace Klub Gaja Poland

Klub Gaja's "Plant a Tree for Peace" project enrolled young people from 35 countries in Europe, Asia and Central and South America. Based in Poland, Klub Gaja has organized Tree Day on 10 October since 2003, drawing together children, officials and community members in a day of eco-education.



Insert from the "Plant for the Planet. The Billion Trees Campaign" publication

Awards

- ▶ 2008 – Jacek Bożek was honored with the highest distinction awarded by the State Forests to professional foresters for the actions undertaken by Klub Gaja to protect the environment and run environmental education programs like Tree Day.
- ▶ 2010 – The Klub Gaja team: Jolanta Migdał, Paweł Grzybowski and Jarosław Kasprzyk received a Green Check – an annual award of the Fund for Environmental Protection and Water Management in Katowice for the long-term and innovative implementation of and commitment to Tree Day.
- ▶ 2013 – The Fund for Environmental Protection and Water Management in Katowice honored Jolanta Migdał, Beata Tarnawa and Halina Sobańska with the Green Check Award for ecological programs and campaigns as part of the 10th annual edition of the program.

3.2 Description of the Partnership

The first edition of the Tree Day program was initiated in close cooperation with educational institutions, but over the years the program has met with interest from other stakeholders, including local governments, institutions, social and professional organizations and enterprises. Every year, several hundred different organizations from all across the country participate in the program, planting trees and shrubs and organizing various activities and campaigns for and around the main topic of trees. Cooperation between different stakeholders' groups and institutions has been the basis of Tree Day since the beginning – building social capital and empowering individuals to celebrate and educate about the value of nature, as well as culture and history. Since the first edition of the program (2003), the State Forests have been an important partner in the program. Forest districts have been supporting local kindergartens and schools in organizing tree planting events by providing them with seedlings or conducting environmental education. For many years now the program has been implemented under the honorary patronage of the **President of the Republic of Poland, the Ministry of the Environment and Climate, Ministry of National Education, and the Ministry of Agriculture.**



Cooperation with educational and academic institutions

We work hand in hand with nurseries, kindergartens, schools, high-schools and universities from all over the country. They apply to the program and organize local Tree Days that apart from planting trees and shrubs are full of various activities including educational classes, trips, thematic lessons, art, photography and literary competitions, exhibitions, performances, happenings or outdoor quests involving searching for trees that are witnesses to history and marking heritage trees.

Tree Day has through our concerted efforts become a cornerstone event in terms of Polish events that focus in and around nature and the environment. Many institutions have been participating in the program continuously since the very beginning. On the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the program, Klub Gaja recognized them for their exceptional work during a gala in Warsaw.

Case study: Examples of cooperation with educational and academic institutions

Gardens for nature

Over the course of three years of cooperation in the "Tree Day – gardens for nature" project – co-financed by Tree and Tomorrow Foundation (Fundacja Drzewo i Jutro) – we created 7 educational gardens on the premises of schools and kindergartens in Bystra, Bestwin, Tychy, Bierzwnik, Sosnowiec, Jaworzno and Warsaw. Together with students, parents and guests, we planted native plant species, creating, among others: orchards, berry gardens, vegetable gardens, rain gardens, sensory paths for therapeutic use and education of children and young people with cognitive disabilities. We built nest boxes for birds, squirrels, and bats, as well as insect hotels.



Planting the sensory path at the TPD "Helenów" Rehabilitation, Education and Care Center in Warsaw



Tree Day in the Multi-sensory Park in Sosnowiec

The Multi-sensory Park in Sosnowiec

For many years, Klub Gaja, in cooperation with the Special School Complex No. 4, has been organizing various events as part of the Tree Day program in the Multi-sensory Park in Sosnowiec, to which it invites residents, especially children and youth. For 4 years, during the ecological picnic organized here in cooperation with the City of Sosnowiec, participants have been taking part in outdoor games and ecological workshops, and also jointly green the park area, thus contributing to increasing biodiversity and improving the existence of animals in the city.

Cooperation with cultural and art institutions

We work closely with libraries, cultural centers, art galleries and artists from all over the country. We carry out joint projects, artistic events, conduct workshops, debates and lectures and organize joint celebrations of Tree Day, including together with the National Library in Warsaw, the Silesian Library and the Scientific Information Center and Academic Library in Katowice, the Służewski Cultural Center in Warsaw, the Bielska BWA Gallery in Bielsko-Biała, and the "Promyk" Communal Cultural Center in Bystra.

Case study: Examples of collaboration with cultural and art institutions

Galeria Bielska BWA

Together with Galeria Bielska BWA, Klub Gaja organized various events which combine ecology and art as part of Tree Day celebrations including happenings, performances, murals and exhibitions. One such event was a joint initiative of Klub Gaja and artist Cecylia Malik as well as a group of local youth from the Arts High School who organized an art campaign with two themes: "Goodbye to the Tree" and "Welcome to the Tree", which was accompanied by planting a linden tree in the garden of Galeria Bielska BWA.



"Goodbye to the Tree" live artistic performance

National Library

During the 13th Annual Tree Day celebrations which that year ran under the slogan of "We read to trees" the National Library and Warsaw City Hall organized a joint outdoor event at Pole Mokotowskie. The event was attended by various arts and culture figures who read out in front of the newly planted trees fragments of the works of eminent authors such as Czesław Miłosz, Halina Poświatowska, Ryszard Kapuściński, T.S. Eliot etc. This particular edition of the Tree Day program inspired people to notice the connections between nature and literature. Across the country, the program's participants met in parks and gardens to read their favorite literary works to selected trees.



Actress Maja Ostaszewska reads to the trees in Pole Mokotowskie

Trees of great individuals and events

Tree Day is also an opportunity to plant trees to commemorate remarkable individuals and historical events. In cooperation with the National Library and the City of Warsaw, we planted maples in Pole Mokotowskie, which commemorated the work of the writer Ryszard Kapuściński. In Katowice, together with the Silesian Library and the City of Katowice, we for example planted a willow to commemorate the Chopin Year and the 200th anniversary of the composer's birth. In Warsaw, we collaborated with the Służew Cultural Center and the Warsaw Greenery Board and planted a linden and an oak tree in memory of the late Professor Maria Janion.



Planting a linden and an oak tree, in memory of the late Prof. Maria Janion.

Cooperation with local governments

We cooperate with local governments that apply for the program and organize their local Tree Day. Every year, for many years now, we have jointly organized the inauguration of the Tree Day program in cities like Warsaw, Katowice, Bielsko-Biała, Sosnowiec, which are endorsed by mayors of these cities. Examples of good cooperation practices include Limanowa County, Ostrów Wielkopolski, Ostrowiec Świętokrzyski and the City of Warsaw, which organize and coordinate the Tree Day program in their area and invite residents, educational institutions, public institutions and social organizations to get involved. Participants receive tree and shrub seedlings, which they plant in their gardens, while tree planting campaigns are organized in the city as well as competitions, workshops and ecological picnics.

The Tree of the Year competition is also organized in several cities in Poland by local governments and organizations, e.g. the Warsaw Tree of the Year, Kraków's Tree of Nowa Huta and Bydgoszcz Tree of the Year, and the winners of these competitions are entered into the national competition organized by Klub Gaja.

Secret Garden in Bielsko-Biała

Klub Gaja organizes a Tree Day in Bielsko-Biała in the Secret Garden, which was set up on an unused plot of land belonging to the local Jewish cemetery, with the core partnership consisting of the Gaja Club, the Jewish Religious Community in Bielsko-Biała and the City of Bielsko-Biała. In the Secret Garden, the Gaja Club conducts various activities combining ecology, art and history, along with specific hands-on activities, such as planting plants or removing invasive species. Together with artists and local residents, it sets up artistic and land art installations there, leads performance walks, and hosts many other types of activities.



Secret Garden in Bielsko-Biała

Tree Day and 25 Years of Freedom

The 12th Tree Day was held under the slogan Tree of Freedom on the occasion of the celebration of 25 years of freedom under the patronage of the President of the Republic of Poland Bronisław Komorowski. In Warsaw, on the Krakowskie Przedmieście, Klub Gaja, together with the City of Warsaw, the State Forests and the artist Waldemar Rudyk, created a symbolic Tree of Freedom, on which Varsovians hung their reflections written on white and red leaves.



Tree of Freedom in Warsaw

Cooperation with businesses

We cooperate with companies and organizations that engage in social projects related to climate protection and biodiversity, contribute to increasing green areas and raising the ecological awareness of society, employees and customers. By supporting the Tree Day program, a company engages in tree planting – employees and customers can take part in the action, receive a certificate attesting to the number of trees planted, help us conduct environmental education, expand green areas, protect biodiversity and the climate.

Davines Brand

Davines, an Italian hair care and skincare company, began its partnership with Klub Gaja in 2016 as part of the Sustainable Beauty Day campaign. We combined tree-planting campaigns as part of our Tree Day with Davines' very own Land Keeper campaign. Every year, Davines Polska hairdressers take an active part in the tree-planting campaign, in particular those which contribute to increasing the biodiversity of forests. Altogether, we have planted over 30 000 trees including in areas devastated in the aftermath of the 2017 storm in Tuchola Forest or the alder forest in the wetlands of the Beskid mountain range.

Omnilogy

As part of the 22nd edition of Tree Day, together with volunteers from Omnilogy (a digital transformation company), representatives of the City of Konin, the Young Climate Ambassadors from the M-LAB Association and the Youth City Council of Konin, we planted 50 fruit trees and shrubs in the City Orchard, including medlars, apple trees, pears, and in addition built nesting boxes for birds, squirrels and insect houses.

EY Global Delivery Services Poland

As part of the 22nd edition of Tree Day, we organized employee volunteering events involving EY Global Delivery Services Poland (a business solutions company) in the garden of Kindergarten No. 102 in Wrocław. The garden was enriched by the planting of 90 new trees and shrubs, a vegetable garden, nesting boxes for birds and squirrels, and houses for wild pollinators. In 2021, in partnership with EY along with BWA Wrocław Galleries of Contemporary Art, we sponsored and organized the Tree of Life mural. The work of artist Ewa Ciepielewska was made with air-purifying paints. The unveiling of the mural coincided with a daylong initiative focused on planting creepers (common ivy) in the square by the gallery.

Cooperation with NGOs in Poland and worldwide

We cooperate with various civic organizations (NGOs) from Poland and abroad and we are a member of a number of coalitions, including the Climate Partnership and the Climate Coalition. Since 2007, the Tree Day program has participated in the Billion Trees for the Planet Campaign. Thanks to cooperation with the international organization ASHOKA, the idea of the Tree Day program, especially planting trees for world peace, has spread to 35 countries. Since 2011, thanks to cooperation with the organization Nadace Partnerství, we have started organizing a Tree of the Year contest (started in the Czech Republic) in Poland. Every year, the Polish winner also takes part in the European Tree of the Year contest.

Examples of cooperation

Tree planting events in Silesia

Since 2018, we have been cooperating with Fundusz Partnerstwa (Partnership Fund) from Kraków as part of the Clean Advantage program, thanks to which every year we have organized various tree and shrub planting events (Tree Day program) in urban areas in Silesia.

Picnic with climate in Warsaw

Since 2010, Klub Gaja has been a member of the "Partnership for Climate" platform coordinated by the capital city of Warsaw. As part of our cooperation, we participated in the annual educational event for Warsaw residents, "Picnic with Climate", during which Klub Gaja promoted the Tree Day program and carried out educational workshops, including on how to build nesting boxes for birds and squirrels and insect hotels.

Tree Day in Iceland

Klub Gaja also brought the idea of the Tree Day program to Iceland. For three years, we cooperated with a community organization called Skógræktarfélag Grindavíkur (The Forest Nursery Club) from Grindavík and organized Tree Day celebrations in Warsaw and Iceland together. As part of our joint project, we planted almost 6,000 trees in Poland and Iceland.



3.3 Funding – Collaborating with Donors

The Tree Day program has been co-financed from various sources, including:

- ▶ **Grants from public funds for the implementation of projects** – including national funds, e.g. the National Fund for Environmental Protection and Water Management, the Social Initiatives Fund, regional funds, e.g. the Provincial Fund for Environmental Protection and Water Management in Katowice, local governments, e.g. in Sosnowiec, Bielsko-Biała, Katowice, and the Norwegian and EEA Funds.
- ▶ **Grants and donations from businesses and organizations**, including the International Tree Foundation, the Drzewo i Jutro Foundation, Life Terra, Troton, Davines, Signify, ALDI Polska, EY Global Delivery Services Poland, Omnilogy. Cooperation between Klub Gaja and Gaia Club (company) in organizing various events related to the Tree Festival.
- ▶ **Donations from individuals and public funds allocated through the 1.5% tax provision for public benefit organizations.**

3.4 Model – how it is organized

Throughout the year, Klub Gaja conducts activities within the Tree Day program and over the course of the spring and autumn in particular, it establishes community gardens, organizes various events with partners and for many years prepares annual Tree Day program celebrations in cooperation with local authorities in Warsaw, Bielsko-Biała, Sosnowiec and Katowice.

Every year, on October 10th, we initiate another edition of the program and summarize the previous one. We invite local communities to participate in the next Tree Day program.

The program is closely linked with the **Tree of the Year** Competition organized each year – as part of the European Tree of the Year contest.

Program timeline:

- September: invitation to participate in the next edition of the Tree Day program. Announcement of the “Magic Tree” competitions (for the most interesting initiatives within the program – the largest number of trees planted, cooperation, for the most interesting implementation of activities), and “Tree of the Year” (searching for trees with the most interesting history).
- October 10th: nationwide inauguration of the next edition of the Tree Day program in Warsaw. Joint tree planting with invited guests, representatives of the City of Warsaw, ambassadors and program partners. Awarding of prizes in the Tree Day program competitions.
- October – November: local celebrations of Tree Days throughout the country.
- By the end of November: submission of applications for the Magic Tree and Tree of the Year competitions.
- By the end of February: announcement of 16 finalists of the Tree of the Year competition in Poland.
- By the end of March: announcement of winners of the Magic Tree competition. Sending thanks to all participants of the Tree Day program.
- June: public voting in the Tree of the Year competition.
- March – November: various actions undertaken by Klub Gaja as part of the Tree Day program.

Research:

Research conducted by students of the SWPs University in Warsaw (2017-2018) on a target group of school and kindergarten teachers from all over Poland (two thousand participants of Tree Day) showed that 99% of participants found the program useful. The activities in the project were highly rated in terms of exerting a positive impact. About 70% of people took part in it for at least 3 years, which means that the program participants are happy to return to it and appreciate its ideas.

3.5 Annual budget, including grant program and staff

Exemplary annual budget 2024

The budget of the Tree Day program in 2024 amounted to approx. PLN 310,000 (72,550 EUR), and can be broken down into the following sources of funding: public funds, e.g. municipal funds – 11%, donations from individuals and proceeds from the 1.5% tax provision for public benefit organizations – 3%, donations from companies and organizations – 86%.

Additionally, as part of the cooperation between Klub Gaja and the Gaia Club LLC, the budget for Tree Day-related activities amounted to about PLN 127,000 (29,720 EUR).

Staff

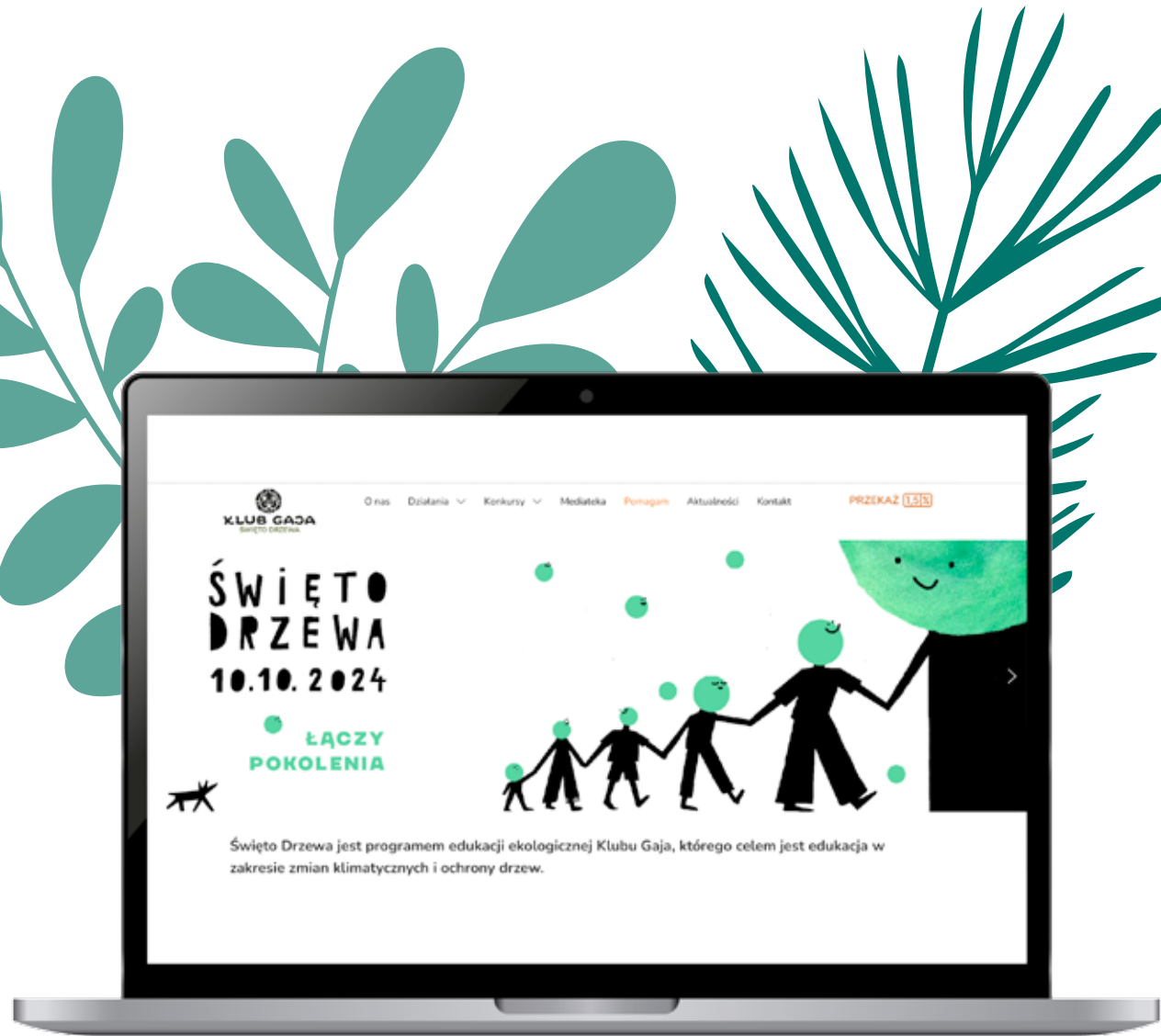
4 people work on the program on a permanent basis.



The Klub Gaja team in action

3.6 Main results

- We have planted nearly 1,072,000 trees and shrubs in Poland
- Over 807,000 people took part in the program
- We have made nearly 2000 shelters/nesting boxes for animals
- We have collected over 5,770 tons of waste paper
- Together with local residents and organizations, we have saved several thousand trees from being cut down
- We have discovered nearly 200 extraordinary trees important to local communities as part of the Tree of the Year competition
- We have created over 30 green areas, including parks, gardens and educational paths in Poland



Program's webpage www.swietodrzewa.pl

3.7 Web, social media, communications

- ▶ We cooperate with the media (radio, TV, magazines, internet portals) that reach a wider audience with information about the World of Trees. As part of the program, regular radio broadcasts were broadcast in nationwide media, e.g. Polish Radio and Radio TOK FM. We also partner with people of culture and art who are ambassadors of the program.
- ▶ The main communication channels of the program are: the website www.swietodrzewa.pl and the home page of Klub Gaja www.klubgaja.pl, the voting page for the Tree of the Year competition – www.drzeworoku.pl, social media – Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube.
- ▶ Press information about the program is sent to local and nationwide media – press, radio, TV, online portals (over 800 e-mail addresses) and our subscribers (5224 email addresses). In 2024, we sent out 28 program-related communiques and gave nearly 40 media interviews.
- ▶ On the www.swietodrzewa.pl website, there is a Tree Day program application form (<https://zgloszenie.swietodrzewa.pl>), which is filled out every year by program participants, providing information about the locations of the activities, the number of trees planted, the number of participants, etc.
- ▶ A tree counter on the website (<https://licznik.swietodrzewa.pl>), where participants register the trees they have planted.



Poster of the Tree Day Celebration in Bielsko-Biała in 2024

4. Other tree-oriented initiatives

In this section we present some other important tree-planting initiatives that the partners of the Planting Our Future program are involved in.

4.1 European Tree of the Year Contest

The beginnings of the **European Tree of the Year** contest can be traced back to the Czech Republic and to the nationwide Tree of the Year contest which was organized there for the first time in 2002 by the Environmental Partnership Foundation - Nadace Partnerství. The European Tree of the Year contest, which today spans Europe, began in earnest in 2011. The European round is a finale consisting of the winners of the national rounds. The number of people voting in the national contests has risen from thousands to almost one hundred thousand people in some countries. At least a quarter of a million people regularly vote online in the European contest alone. Every year in February, the online voting for the European Tree of the Year is hosted by the Environmental Partnership Association (EPA). Since 2011 then the number of countries involved in the contest has gone up from 5 to 16.



Logo of the European Tree of the Year contest



The Chudobin Pine – Guardian of the Flooded Village in Czech Republic – Winner of the 2019 Tree of the Year and Winner of the 2020 European Tree of the Year. Photo by Marek Olbrzymek.

4.1.1 The mission and values of European Tree of the Year

European Tree of the Year strives to:

- ▶ Raise awareness about precious trees in our midst by searching for and promoting old trees that have a story to them and/or that have a connection to the local community thus conveying the message that these are examples of heritage passed down to us by our ancestors
- ▶ Empower active citizens to care for the environment by highlighting the significance of old trees in the natural and cultural heritage setting that surrounds them and which are deserving of care and protection
- ▶ Strengthen local communities, foster stronger relationships among people, and enhance their awareness about the environment they live in
- ▶ Connect tree enthusiasts into a global village of people with a genuine interest in engaging in symbolic actions



4.1.2 Justification and explanation

The majority of citizens in the global village are aware of the threats to our natural environment. Biodiversity as a whole suffers from major problems that need to be tackled on multiple levels.

People's relationship to nature can take many forms. Virtually all citizens of the global village see the importance of a forest and individual trees in maintaining the healthy functioning of an ecosystem, but also as important features in defining the identity of the landscape we all live in. There is no doubt that the relationship to those places in which we spend our time is intimately connected with its condition, appearance, history and features. Trees are symbols of beauty, majesty, nature, and the memory of the landscape; in many places around the world, they have been worshiped and protected.



Dragon oak in Lozorno, the Slovakian Tree of the Year in 2022, and runner-up in the 2023 European Tree of the Year contest.

The contest contributes to balancing the hunger for industrial growth with maintaining crucial aspects of social and environmental sustainability. The trees bring people together to care for and protect their landscapes, encouraging local wildlife. The tree stories build pride for local natural heritage. The campaigning for trees generates and connects groups of active citizens with an interest for environmental protection, thus helping to create a more active and conscious civil society in general. The tree-contest naturally helps environmental leaders become more successful in their efforts to communicate issues involving nature and landscape protection to the common public. The element of contest naturally attracts media; the non-sophisticated and non-controversial theme of trees creates a space to discuss and share other up-to-date and more controversial cases connected to the protection of natural resources and combating climate change.

4.1.3 The contest

To achieve the mission of European Tree of the Year, we follow a basic guiding principle. We are not searching for the oldest, the tallest, the biggest, the most beautiful or the rarest tree. We are searching for the most beloved tree, a tree with a story that can capture the imagination. These tree-stories, along with the communities for whom they matter and members of the public who want to chip in is what makes this initiative so unique in how it can bring and hold the community together. Respecting these principles, the organizers should set the detailed rules adapted to conditions that may apply at the local level.

Recommended stages of the Tree of the Year contest

- Tree nominations
- Choosing the finalists and their documentation
- Public voting process
- Award ceremony
- Special treatment for the winning tree and tree planting
- Nomination to the European final & the European Tree of the Year Award ceremony

Case study: Local Tree of the Year / Tree of Nowa Huta Contest



Globe cheery in Mistrzejowice, Nowa Huta, Kraków

Local Tree of the Year Contests are also organized in Poland. The first such competition (in 2017) was organized jointly by the Partnership Fund and the Norwid Cultural Center in Kraków's Nowa Huta district. The search is for unique trees that tell an interesting story, connect people and generations, have a high natural and landscape value and are important for the residents of Nowa Huta. The contest is part of the broader Green Nowa Huta initiative with its vision of a sustainable city. Nowa Huta is the greenest part of Krakow. It is also a space for environmental initiatives that show what the idea of a sustainable city is all about: a city that cares about environmental protection, cultural heritage and clean air, promotes sustainable transportation, environmental education and ecotourism, protects and creates green spaces and engages all generations of residents. In 2024, the Globe Cherry in Mistrzejowice (*Prunus x eminens 'Umbraculifera'*) won the Tree of Nowa Huta award.

Partners: Klub Gaja, Ecotravel Foundation, Society for Nature Protection (Towarzystwo na Rzecz Ochrony Przyrody), University of the Third Age at the University of Agriculture, Senior Activity Center Mistrzejowice, The New Center Foundation (Fundacja Nowe Centrum), Greenways Poland Association).

4.1.4 Tree nominations

The launch of the contest usually coincides with the first day of spring. After the official kick-off, anyone can nominate "their" tree – individuals, firms, communities, institutions, organizations. An entry for the Tree of the Year contest contains the story of the tree, a photograph, description of where the tree is growing, and its botanical features. The main criteria that decide about the tree becoming one of the finalists are its story and its connection with the community.

4.1.5 Choosing the finalists and their documentation

A jury of experts in botany or dendrology is asked to choose the finalists out of all the nominations. They try to select finalists from all the regions of the country so that as many people as possible can join the final election. Later, the team of organizers and a professional photographer visits each one of the finalists, takes pictures and video recordings of them, and meets those who nominated the tree. The organizers use this opportunity to advise the nominators on how to get the most votes needed for the victory of "their" tree. The photographs taken during these meetings are used in a traveling exhibition which tours the country to promote the contest.



Beech Heart of the Garden in the Wojsławice Arboretum, winner of the 2023 Tree of the Year competition in Poland and the 2024 European Tree of the Year. Source: fot. Bożka Piotrowska, Klub Gaja Archive



Oak Fabrykant in Łódź, 2022 Polish Tree of the Year and 2023 European Tree of the Year. Source: Klub Gaja Archive

Public voting process

The voting is public and takes place in different forms: online (Facebook or website), via text messages, in-person at voting stations etc. One of the recommendations for the future is to introduce fee-based voting so that everyone taking part is actually donating money for tree planting in the process.

Award ceremony

The event is usually linked to the national or European Tree Day celebrations. It is an important occasion for all the local nominators, supporters of individual tree entries, sponsors, and organizers to meet and to honor the trees and the amazing stories related to each and every one of them.

Special treatment for the winning tree and tree planting

The award to the person or organization behind the winning entry comes usually in the form of a dedicated service to look after the winner with certified arborists and the local tree planting community involved. This is organized as a very important event for the community that entered the tree into the contest.

Nomination to the European final & the European Tree of the Year Award ceremony

Each national Tree of the Year winner is automatically nominated to the European final. The intention of the European round is to highlight the contest of tree-stories from different countries as symbolic of our relationship to the diverse places and environments where we live. Moreover, the European Tree of the Year contest brings tree enthusiasts together and thereby fosters a global village of people with shared interests.

4.1.6 The owner of the Brand

The Environmental Partnership Association (**EPA, www.environmentalpartnership.org**) is the owner of the European Tree of the Year brand. The brand may be used to promote Tree of the Year events and contests at the local level for the express purpose of promoting the Tree of the Year values and mission. The brand is protected under international law and its misuse shall be prosecuted and may be the subject of litigation and damages.



Logo of EPA

More information: www.treeoftheyear.org

4.2 European tree planting initiatives

Within the Environmental Partnership Association, we partner with the US based **Clean Advantage™** and **GreenPrint™**, two carbon emission reduction programs, in order to implement various carbon offset projects in different locations in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland and Hungary.

Clean Advantage™ is a program that automatically offsets carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gas emissions by investing in a wide range of reforestation, alternative energy, biomass, and other projects both locally and globally. It also supports local, greenscape projects such as tree plantings, park clean-ups, school projects, and similar sustainability initiatives in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, and Hungary. Together, these investments and partner initiatives allow Clean Advantage™ to automatically provide a sustainable solution for companies, employees, and the community at large (more information: www.cleanadvantageprogram.com).



Clean Advantage™ logo

GreenPrint™ increases consumer goodwill, sales, and profitability while practicing promoting sustainability and creating a net-positive impact on our environment for the world's leading retail fuel, fleet, and product brands. They help non-profit, businesses and communities around the world with carbon offset projects of different standards and varieties to assist in meeting their carbon reduction goals and consumer demand.

4.2.1 European tree planting initiatives

This is a European initiative to plant 3 billion trees by 2030 in the EU as a means of sequestering CO₂ and thus a contribution to mitigating climate change. It is a program of the European Commission in collaboration with the European Environmental Agency, set up as part of the EU Green Deal and the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030. As stated in the information materials about the program, the European Commission facilitates, motivates, counts and monitors the process, as well as provides political and technical support, communication and labelling. The planted trees may be registered via the **MapMyTree web app**. Nadace Partnerstvi has become the partner of the initiative and has registered trees in the database.



Source:
<https://mapmytree.eea.europa.eu>

More information: forest.eea.europa.eu/3-billion-trees/introduction

4.2.2 Life Terra

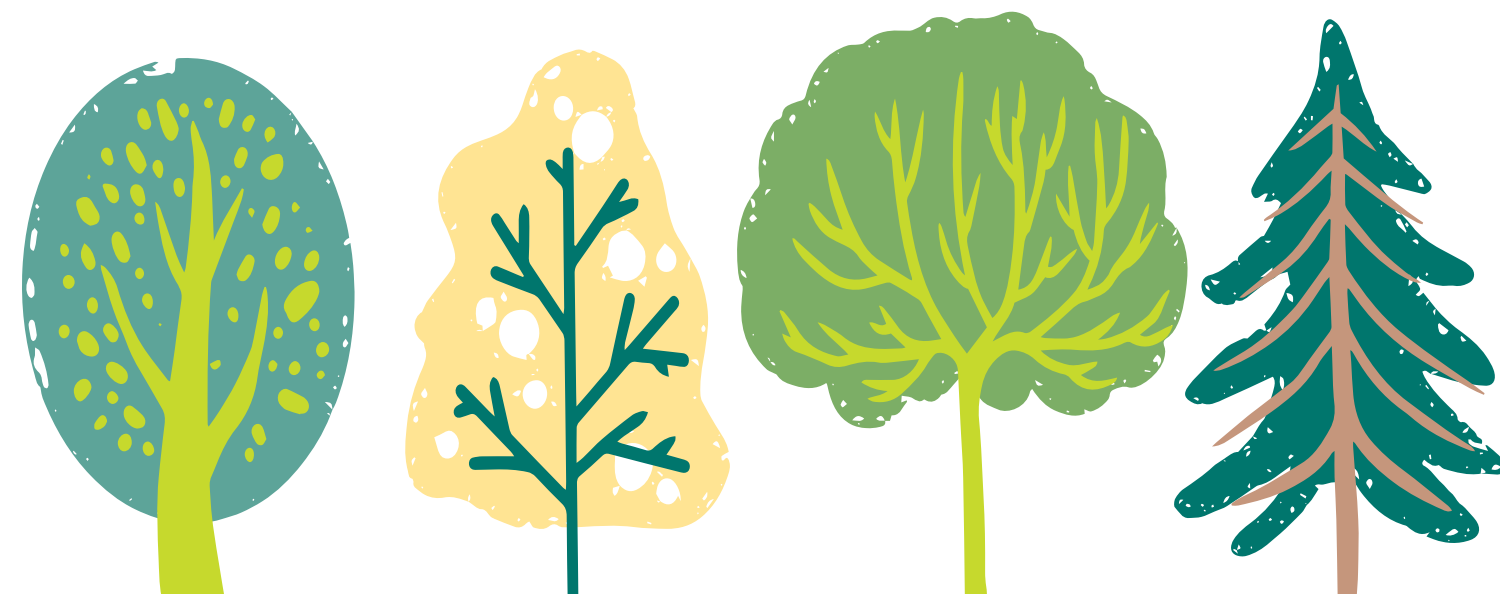
Another platform of tree planting organizations in Europe is Life Terra with the goal to plant 500 million trees in Europe. The project is run by the Life Terra Foundation based in the Netherlands and co-financed by the European Commission through the LIFE Program. Klub Gaja and Nadace Partnerstvi are partners of this initiative.



Source: Life Terra webpage

Life Terra Foundation together with Nadace Partnerstvi coordinates the **European Tree Planting Day** that started in autumn of 2024. The European Tree Planting Day is a movement aiming at creating the most synergy and uniting communities across Europe in the process by planting trees simultaneously. As the organizers explain on their webpage: "From municipalities, companies, NGOs to individuals, they all join forces in a collective effort to combat climate change through the simple yet powerful act of planting trees".

More information: www.lifeterra.eu, www.treeplantingday.eu



4.3 Stop logging in the Białowieża Forest (case study from Poland)



Białowieża Forest, photo by Małgorzata Klemens

About Białowieża Forest

Białowieża Forest, located on the border between Poland and Belarus, is one of Europe's last and largest remaining parts of the primeval forest that once covered much of the continent. This UNESCO World Heritage site is renowned for its rich biodiversity and serves as a crucial refuge for numerous species of flora and fauna, including the European bison, which is the continent's heaviest and largest land mammal. The forest covers about 1500 square kilometers and features a mix of old-growth forest, meadows, and wetlands. It is characterized by its towering trees, which on average are 130 years old, including species such as oak, spruce, and pine. The forest's unique ecosystem is home to a variety of wildlife, including wolves, lynx, deer, and over 250 species of birds, making it a vital area for conservation efforts.



Camp for the Białowieża Forest

Stop logging in the Białowieża Forest action

In 2016, the Białowieża Forest became the scene of huge public protests against its destruction which were sparked by large-scale logging in the wake of a decision by the Ministry of Environment to expand this measure under the pretext of fighting the European spruce bark beetle (*Ips typographus*).

The protests started with the formation of a **Coalition of NGOs called "We love Białowieża Forest" (Koalicja Kocham Puszcę)**. The group of the participating environmental organizations¹ launched a petition addressed to the Prime Minister of Poland, appealing to intervene in this matter and to stop the increase of logging in Białowieża Forest.

Within three months, hundreds of thousands of Polish citizens signed a petition to halt the logging. The group of several non-governmental organizations, associating lawyers, naturalists, activists, filed an official complaint with the European Commission, reporting the violation of law by the decision of the Polish Minister of the Environment.

In spring of 2017, heavy logging equipment entered the forest and "fighting the bark beetle" – the authorities' pretext for greenlighting devastation to the forest – began the destruction of Europe's best-preserved ancient woodland.



Slovak and Czech activists supporting the protection of the Białowieża Forest

In May of 2017, the defenders of the forest immediately appeared on the scene – activists from Dzika Polska, Greenpeace, and Workshop for All Beings, and a lot of independent activists and individual citizens converged on Białowieża Forest to create the **Camp for Białowieża Forest** (in Polish: Obóz dla Puszczy, see: <https://vimeo.com/224700169>), which organized peaceful blockades of logging operations between May and September 2017. But the protests spread throughout Poland – there were countless demonstrations in many Polish cities, supported by European organizations and activists.

The Camp for Białowieża Forest was a grassroots movement aimed at raising awareness and mobilizing support for the conservation of Białowieża Forest. The Camp served as a platform for activists, researchers, and nature enthusiasts to gather, share knowledge, and engage in hands-on conservation activities, all while advocating for the protection of this unique ecosystem. It was a time of maximum participation from volunteers, including students, environmental activists, and nature lovers, who were eager to contribute to conservation efforts and learn more about the significance of Białowieża Forest.

¹ The Coalition was established by: Wild Poland Foundation (Fundacja Dzika Polska), ClientEarth – Lawyers for Earth (ClientEarth – Prawnicy dla Ziemi), the Greenmind Foundation (Fundacja Greenmind), Greenpeace Poland (Greenpeace Polska), the Association Workshop for All Of Beings (Stowarzyszenie Pracownia na Rzecz Wszystkich Istot) and WWF Poland (WWF Polska). Source: www.kochampuszcze.pl

Values of the Camp for Białowieża Forest²



Protest in defence of the Białowieża Forest during the UNESCO summit in Kraków, 2017

Democracy

We discuss and decide together. We try to use consensus not polls, to avoid alienating individuals and building competing fractions. Everyone can get involved in the decision-making process. It requires transparency.

Lack of hierarchy

No one is ruling over one another. We can't impose our will on others, because everyone is equal. We don't have a CEO or a board that is governing the group, planning or taking responsibility for our actions. But we need coordinators, media speakers – these are the individual roles that add to unequal distribution of new capacities, positions, prestige.

Solidarity

We don't leave anyone behind with her/his problems. We're facing many repressive actions and we need to support each other to get through them.

Non-violence

Both internally and externally, verbally and physically – non-violence is our core mind-set. Physical force, aggression, coercion – we're facing them when dealing with the authorities, and we can't (and don't want to) compete with them in this domain. Our strength lies in solidarity, perseverance, grassroots mobilization, a sense of humor.

No logo

We leave our affiliations outside the Camp, and engage as citizens, not representatives of a given NGO, political party, company. We create a bottom-up, social movement. On the other hand, we want to build alliances and cooperate with like-minded organizations and donors.

² Source: text from dr Jakub Rok, one of the activists involved in setting up the Camp for Białowieża Forest

The logging was finally stopped after a decision by the **Court of Justice of the European Union** in November 2017. In April 2018, the Court announced its judgment that the decision to increase logging in the Forest was unlawful³ in light of the EU Directives on conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora as well as protection of wild birds and the declaration of the Natura 2000 site.

What happened afterwards?

After 2017, some people decided to stay on in the heart of Białowieża Forest and work in the field of nature protection and environmental education. This was primarily made possible by Adam Wajrak, environmental journalist and Nuria Selva, environmental scientist who gave the activists their own property – an old school building in the village of Teremiski. The first initiative of this group was to found the Białowieża Forest Local Information Point, a hub for visitors coming to Białowieża Forest which offers a place to meet for use by the local community and visitors alike.

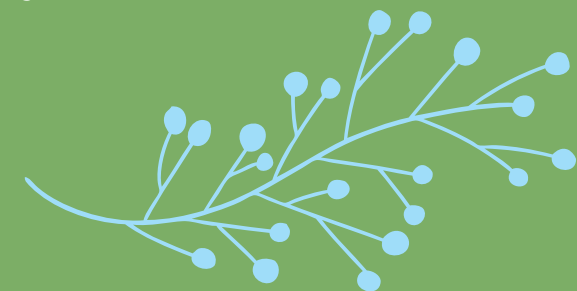
Other important projects for protecting trees and climate in Poland

- **Forests and Citizens** (Polish: Lasy i Obywatele) – a map of Polish forests and grassroots tree movements that everyone can join and create: lasyiobywatele.pl.
- **Common Forest** (Polish: Wspólny Las) – organizing the annual event, a forest festival drawing attention to a different problem or challenge facing Polish nature: wspolnylas.pl.
- **Time for the Forest** (Polish: Czas na Las) – a planting program and CO₂ compensation calculator run by the **Aeris Futuro Foundation**: aerisfuturo.pl/program/czas-na-las
- **Green transformations and participatory projects by the Sendzimir Foundation** (in Polish: Fundacja Sendzimira): sendzimir.org.pl

The House of Nature and Culture Association

In 2021, the activists who decided to stay, established an association to have greater influence and say in what was happening in the Białowieża Forest. The association is called The House of Nature and Culture (Polish: Dom Przyrody i Kultury, DoPiK). DoPiK serves as a local nature-based community center, educational center, a place open to meetings, cultural activities and workshops, forest camps which also hosts various types of local, neighborhood initiatives, offering its space for meetings of locals and local organizations, and on top of that it brings to the table the rich and very diverse experiences of its members and their networks of friends from the Białowieża Forest region as well as from all over Poland.

Every year since 2018, DoPiK teams up with outside volunteers and local community members and organizes Wild is Beautiful, a nature-culture-community festival. In the two years prior – 2016 and 2017 – the festival was organized as a meeting for nature enthusiasts and was dedicated to the memory of the late Janusz Korbel, an environmentalist who started a social movement dedicated to the protection of Białowieża Forest from logging.



³ see: curia.europa.eu/juris/document/document.jsf?text=&docid=201150&pageIndex=0&doclang=PL&mode=req&dir=&occ=first&part=1&cid=330757

DoPiK is deeply rooted in the local social and natural fabric, which is why cooperation on multiple levels with the inhabitants of the Municipality of Białowieża and the entire Forest region is of the essence for the association. It is particularly keen on finding new forms of inclusive cooperation, which is still a big challenge in such a unique place where very different worlds, perspectives, social groups, cultures, histories, experiences and aspirations coincide and often collide. On a daily basis, it cooperates with local rural women's groups, a variety of associations and institutions, of which many are active in the municipality (including the Białowieża National Park, several large international research institutes, cultural centers, an orphanage and others).

All of the pictures come from the Facebook page: [www.fb.com/dlapuszczy](https://www.facebook.com/dlapuszczy)

See the movie about activists from the Białowieża Forest: youtu.be/YHNCyhiQdNA?feature=shared



Dunin Oak – Guardian of the Białowieża Forest, 2021 Polish Tree of the Year and 2022 European Tree of the Year. Source: Klub Gaja Archive

PART III

Planting Our Future in Central Europe | Implementation Manual



1. SWOT ANALISIS

Strengths:

- ▶ The initiative can connect people, communities, institutions and use collaboration to achieve a common goal.
- ▶ The program is based on the energy of local leaders, citizens' involvement (communities and active people is what connects the programs in each country).
- ▶ In CZ: there are big players/decision makers involved from public institutions. Program has strong support from businesses that understand they are the part of the solution to tackle climate change.
- ▶ In SK: the program uses the power of communities and volunteers. Planting and tree care activities involve the mayors of villages and towns.
- ▶ In PL: there is a vast base of knowledge and experience in environmental education related to trees that involves all generations, especially young people; storytelling about trees draws on history, cultural heritage and artistic performance.
- ▶ We are long-term partners with strong relations based on trust and common values. We have knowledge, experiences and partners.
- ▶ As a network we have many European/international connections – networking, know-how exchange, resources.

Weaknesses:

- ▶ Different situations in each country regarding land ownership, land management structure, policies on both local and state levels.
- ▶ Insufficient monitoring of tree plantings; Lack of a common registration system of trees planted (on national and Central-European levels).
- ▶ Lack of instruments/institutional support on how to measure the information exchange on tree plantings and the planting/tree care needs; inability of state institutions to respond quickly to the current needs and opportunities.
- ▶ There are other competing tree planting initiatives unwilling to cooperate.
- ▶ There continues to be more demand for tree plantings than we can realistically support with a corresponding lack of financial / human / political resources on local, national and international levels.

Opportunities

- ▶ Trees connect people across all spectrums (political, economical, generational). The Program can be a big opportunity in times when our societies are becoming more and more polarized.
- ▶ The overarching message of the program links three major themes: Trees – Democracy – Freedom.
- ▶ The differences between the countries can be used as an opportunity to use different models, strategies on how to proceed – a chance to find a new ways, new possibilities.
- ▶ Joint communication goal is not only based on quantification of planted trees, but also on the quality of planting and the benefit of new practices & new topics (e.g., plantings in agroforestry as part of regenerative agriculture, environmental education).
- ▶ Sharing good practices.
- ▶ There is an opportunity to have a bigger voice, including the input to the DG-Environment programs, such as 3 billion trees, etc.
- ▶ The opportunity to implement less radical environmental action.

Threats:

- ▶ Insecure global situation regarding climate change policies, such as the Green Deal; a risk of the revival of world-wide policies focused on bringing back fossil fuels as a source of energy and downplaying the importance of the climate crisis.
- ▶ Negative pressure on environmental NGOs and activists.
- ▶ Weak institutions unable to collaborate. Growing polarization of societies that threatens collaborative, positive community actions.
- ▶ Unstable political situation in some countries (e.g., Slovakia) regarding democracy and civil society organizations. Growth of radical civic engagement rather than collaborative actions world-wide.
- ▶ Absence of national and global leaders engaged and committed to direct environmental activities.



2. Message

- ▶ Trees connect people and communities, as well as generations.
- ▶ Trees bring positive messages and are rooted in the culture and history.
- ▶ Planting trees is not only about quantity, but about quality.
- ▶ Planting trees by communities is a way of healing society and building connections and bridges.
- ▶ Trees are holistic – related to nature, history, culture.
- ▶ **Trees = Democracy = Freedom.**



Communication goal

Our goal is to create a movement – it's not only a simple act of planting trees, it is more than that. It is an emotion, people will join if they feel a need or connection, involvement, engagement, people need to feel that they need to do something.

3. Common Principles

1. Planting Our Future initiative is about planting in open spaces but outside forests – in the countryside and cities, where the trees are needed.
2. The program promotes planting of the native species of trees and those adaptive to climate change, as well as trees available in the vicinity of the planting event (the closest possible; a zero-kilometer approach). There is an importance in increasing the resilience of the countryside and cities as well as the quality of the landscape we live in.
3. Planting trees does not only contribute to mitigating the effects of climate change and climate adaptation but also in preventing soil erosion and biodiversity protection and restoration in the countryside and the cities.
4. Tree care after planting is an integral part of the program.
5. We are focusing our activities on communities – the program involves communities, volunteers, active citizens from all generations. We initiate cooperation with local governments, institutions, schools and businesses, establishing partnerships between various stakeholders for the purpose of planting and protecting the trees.
6. The program has an important educational component and environmental education activities are an essential part of it. The main thrust here is to raise awareness about the importance of trees and equip the participants with knowledge and appreciation for the multitude of functions trees have and the role they play in sustaining life.
7. The initiative is based on sharing good practices and knowledge.
8. The long-term principle is achieving a critical mass of planted trees (outside forests) as well as a critical mass of knowledge about planting trees, tree care and tree education.
9. Tree planting supports democratic values – it is a very effective way to integrate society on every level and connect people with each other.

Planting Our Future is the Central European initiative consisting of national tree planting programs based on common principles.

Planting Our Future in national languages:

Czech: **Sázíme budoucnost**

Slovak: **Sadíme budúcnosť**



Polish: **Sadzimy przyszłość**


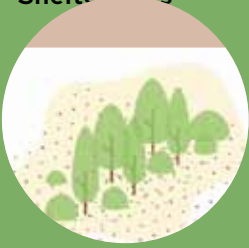
Other languages – examples: Ukrainian: **Саджанці для майбутнього**





Types of plantings
Source: www.sazimebudoucnost.cz



NAME	DESCRIPTION	WHY PLANT THEM?
<div>Solitary Trees</div> <div></div>	<p>A solitary tree. Although by itself, it dominates every field, garden, street and park where it stands. It creates a unique atmosphere and a genius loci of the place where it grows. A green and quiet home for birds and insects. They are the center-point of every community, a living compass and a long-lived source of life and memory. We understand these trees as symbols of the cultural and natural landscape.</p> <p>In an increasingly hot summer, however, everyone appreciates the shadow of these green giants. A car parked in the shade of a tree wins over a car parked on a hot street. The tree is a natural air conditioner, working for us completely for free.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● They are simply beautiful! They also have an invaluable effect on a healthy climate.● They capture dust and other harmful substances.● Throughout the year, they provide a unique home for many different small animals. Without them, neither birds or bees could thrive.● In the cities and countryside, they prevent the rapid outflow of water after heavy rains.● They can absorb CO₂ which we are pumping into the air and which is significantly warming the whole Earth.
<div>Tree-lined avenues</div> <div></div>	<p>Avenues lined with trees. The routes that will lead us home safely. A swell of sounds and smells, canopy after canopy under which we can walk seemingly endlessly. Whether composed of only one species or flowering in different colours, it is an indispensable complement to nearby rivers and streams. It is a living boundary that accompanies all good journeys. It naturally divides the landscape and helps people find their way, whether in cities or in nature. The tradition of tree-lined paths and roads dates back to the Baroque period, when they were created to provide shade for passing troops.</p> <p>When planting a row of trees alongside a road, a sufficient distance from the curb has to be maintained. It should be at a minimum 5 to 9.5 meters so that the trees do not hinder passage of vehicles. Unfortunately, even with these standards in place, other factors have contributed to make it less likely for city and town planners these days to plant trees alongside major roads. That said, rows of trees decorating roads and streets is not the only option; trees planted in a line can seamlessly integrate with other features of the landscape, including streams and other waterfronts, field boundaries, footpaths and trails.</p> <p>These trees create a unique landscape, which has been destroyed in recent years by falling them in reference to road safety.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● They help drivers and cyclists to better orient themselves.● They create beneficial shade, providing protection against excessive heat.● They block noise and pollutants from road traffic. They protect our homes, especially where there is a lot of road traffic.● They make it easier for animals to move around and find homes in an intensely cultivated landscape.● They contribute to reducing the amount of CO₂ in the atmosphere.● They prevent roads from becoming buried in the snow.● They act as windbreaks.

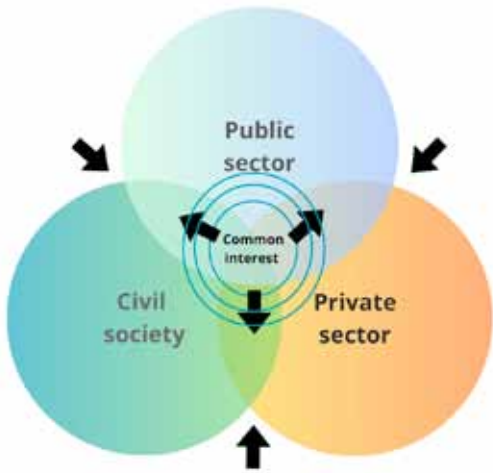
NAME	DESCRIPTION	WHY PLANT THEM?
<div>Orchards</div> <div></div>	<p>Orchards. These are fragrant trees and shrubs strewn with fruit. Of particular worth for the landscape are sets of original varieties of apple, cherry and other delicacies with grassy spaces between them. They are suitable for the city and rural landscapes, where they have a very positive effect on their surroundings. They are an oasis of dew, peace and eternally diligent bees. The trees in an orchard draw people who want to picnic or go for a walk.</p> <p>Fruit trees have been a staple feature of an inviting landscape since the beginning of recorded time. They are our cultural heritage. For generations, they have learned to resist the adverse effects of weather, diseases and pests, which helps them to withstand all the hardships that new varieties can't cope with as well. They add to the diversity of the landscape and attract much more than just insects.</p> <p>To provide a real benefit to the landscape, it is better to plant the trees at greater distances from each other so that the crown can expand more fully. This way, orchards can actually develop and perform other functions than just bearing fruit. It is best to fill the area between the trees with grass and mow it twice a year. The trees will retain enough moisture, and the grass under the trees can be grazed or the hay can be used as feed for farm animals.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● They increase the diversity of the landscape and help us orient ourselves.● Yum! Their fruits are edible and tasty.● They are nectar-producing trees. This means they attract bees, whose honey we can then enjoy. Bees also help trees to create fruit by pollinating their flowers.● They give us shade and moisture for the soil, cooling their surroundings.● Their roots strengthen the soil, preventing erosion.● They are historically connected with the landscape.● They are home to small animals, such as birds, bees, beetles, and bats.
<div>Shelterbelts</div> <div></div>	<p>Shelterbelts. Shrubs, trees and herbs that sit in the middle of long, open fields. They shelter animals for free. They fundamentally increase the diversity of the landscape and prevent it from transforming into a desert.</p> <p>You will encounter many shelterbelts, especially in fields, while walking through the rural landscape. These are forgotten pieces of land that were once waterlogged and barren. People did not know how or did not want to use them, so they were left on the abandoned land.</p> <p>They served the landowners as living boundary stones, but can do much more. They are mainly shrubs in a short lane, but it always depends on the conditions of the field. They are often not very wide, so as not to interfere with neighbouring land. You may also find trees, typically cherries, in the shelter belts. Most often, however, they smell of rose hips, hawthorn, blackthorn and other commonly represented shrubs, such as elder, dogwood, privet, viburnum or ivy.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● They return life to the fields, pressured by mechanisation and chemistry. They repair the damage caused by collectivisation.● Inaccessible vegetation protects animals from predators and rainy weather. The trees may provide a quiet hiding place for partridges, quails, hares, and other game in wide fields.● They can also diminish strong gusts of wind, thus preventing erosion.● Rainwater infiltrates them, which would otherwise travel further down the slope and carry the soil away.

NAME	DESCRIPTION	WHY PLANT THEM?
<div>Windbreaks</div> <div></div>	<p>Windbreak. This is nothing more than a group of trees and shrubs planted in one or even more rows. Thanks to this, a natural protection of the field against wind erosion is formed. It allows game, small animals and insects to move freely and safely through the landscape. In order for our landscape not to resemble an agricultural semi-desert, from which all water has disappeared, windbreaks are indispensable, especially in dry places.</p> <p>Within landscaping, there is a trend to use them as an important element of ecological stability. For windbreaks to fulfill their function of balancing ecosystems and counteracting erosion, people need to take good care of them. Ideally, there should be a whole network of them spread across the landscape in a deliberate and carefully planned manner; they cannot be planted just anywhere. They should be positioned to slow the wind down from the side where it blows the most. The entire network of windbreaks working in unison prevents the wind from causing damage.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Especially in dry areas, they protect against wind erosion.● They cool and humidify the air.● They prevent the soil and vegetation from drying out.● They help create dew and catch snow.● They help increase agricultural yield because they protect crops from the wind.● They also prevent the land from being drained when farmers have not planted any crops on it.
<div>Green city oasis and community gardens</div> <div></div>	<p>Green oasis and community gardens. The future of a neglected public space in a city waiting to be discovered and freed from grey captivity is the challenge and the allure. Everyone likes to live in a pleasant environment. Let's find these places together and make green oases of them - the pride of our neighbourhoods. Public spaces serve all residents, particularly the elderly and parents with small children. They determine the quality of life in the village, town or a city.</p> <p>If you have found a site that seems to be suitable for a green oasis, discuss your intention with the landowner and network administrator first. The design should be created in collaboration with a landscape architect, who will add a spatial concept to the site and help prevent problems. When planning a public space or community garden, it is appropriate to involve other local residents, organise public planning sessions, shared implementation, neighbourhood celebrations, and other such collaborations. We plant species suitable for life in the city in easily accessible places. That is, those that are not allergic or toxic (for example, yew), but also those that are resistant to pollution and drought.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● They increase the quality of life in the place where you live.● Thanks to the revitalisation, pleasant meeting places are created. They have a significant positive effect on the health of the population.● They cool and humidify the air.● They create shade in hot places, effectively lowering the temperature.● They capture dust and other harmful substances, and retain valuable water resources in the city.● They allow other animals to inhabit the city, such as birds.

4. Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration

Multi-stakeholder collaboration is the backbone of the program's modus operandi. By multi-stakeholder collaboration we mean:

1. Collaboration of partners representing community (civil society), public and private sector,
2. Having common interest and implementing jointly agreed goals based on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the understanding of common principles of the program,
3. Using the competences and resources of each partner in order to generate an impulse (momentum) for change,
4. Achieving long-term impact and effective transformation⁴.



Source: Collective Leadership Institute, <https://www.collectiveleadership.de>

Agenda 2030 and 17 Sustainable Development Goals

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015. " It provides a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future. At its heart are the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are an urgent call for action by all countries in a global partnership. They recognize that ending poverty and other deprivations must go hand-in-hand with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth – all while tackling climate change and working to preserve our oceans and forests".



⁴ Definition of multi-stakeholder collaboration is based on the methodology of the Collective Leadership Institute and its publications: Kuenkel P., Kühn E., Stucker D.,Williamson F. D. (2021), Leading Transformative Change Collectively. A Practitioner Guide to Realizing the SDGs. Routledge, London & New York.

If we look at the SDGs, the Planting Our Future program contributes directly to – at least – seven of them:

- ▶ Climate action
- ▶ Sustainable cities and communities
- ▶ Life on land
- ▶ Good health and well being
- ▶ Quality education
- ▶ Clean water and sanitation
- ▶ Partnerships for the goals

Multi-stakeholder collaboration within the Planting Our Future program occurs on 3 levels: 1. Local level, 2. National level and 3. European/global level. We have defined the key partners and their roles in order to implement the program.

4.1 Local level

At the local level, **COMMUNITY LEADERS - ACTIVE VOLUNTEERS** are the cornerstone for the program's implementation. Most ideas arise from the needs of local people, who then present their ideas to the decision-makers. The most common scenario is when local community leaders approach the municipal office – that's where the original connection is created, the beginning of the network and stakeholder collaboration. But the idea itself comes from local residents – a classic bottom-up approach. In most cases, the initiators represent local **NGOs – CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS** or informal groups (as occurs in the case of some local plantings in Slovakia).

The key stakeholder at the local level is the **MUNICIPALITY – LOCAL GOVERNMENT**. The municipality contributes to the tree planting project in a variety of financial and non-financial ways, most often by:

- ▶ Providing land for plantings (most of the plantings are done on public land),
- ▶ Supporting the project with financial or in-kind contributions (e.g., providing the venue for partner meetings, refreshments at the event etc.),
- ▶ Involving local schools and kindergartens, culture centers, volunteer fire brigades, and other municipal institutions,
- ▶ Providing contacts to other important stakeholders, such as land landowners, e.g., farmers who want to plant, local businesses, etc.

Experience indicates that smaller municipalities tend to have more diverse forms of cooperation. People know each other better – they can easily involve other local people, volunteers, organisations, clubs for retirees, sport clubs, schools etc. Within these stakeholder networks there is an important role for **LOCAL BUSINESSES** which are oftentimes involved in the organization of planting events as well as providing in-kind contributions or outright sponsorship.

At the local level, **SCHOOLS** and kindergartens are likewise important stakeholders – most of the planting events involve school children and teachers which ensures that the projects have an important environmental dimension that resonates. Also – in case of local actions carried out as part of the Tree Day in Poland – very often the initiative actively involves local **CULTURAL CENTERS** and sometimes local **LIBRARIES**, because trees are part of our shared culture. As an example, for many years now, Klub Gaja (PL) has been cooperating with the "Promyk" Communal Cultural Center in Bystra in the Wilkowice Municipality, organizing local celebrations of Tree Day, during which they have planted trees and shrubs around the center, its branches in Meszna and Wilkowice, as well as in the historical park at the Center for Pulmonology and Thoracic Surgery in Bystra, which is a popular spot for patients, residents and tourists alike. The initiative has combined tree planting with educational workshops for students from local schools and kindergartens, during which they e.g. built houses for wild bees, birds and squirrels, which now sit proudly in their home gardens.

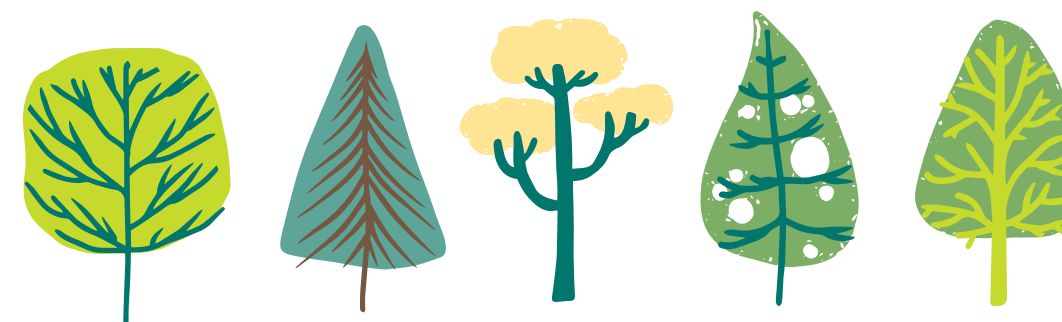
Local tree-planting events completed as part of the program in each country come in various shapes and forms. Some of the highlights of this variability are provided below:

- ▶ Financial support for planting/tree care projects through small grants (in Czechia and Slovakia),
- ▶ Direct organization of model planting events (for example: annual Tree of the Day plantings by Klub Gaja in the municipalities of Bielsko-Biała, Katowice, Warsaw, or annual planting of the Alley of Freedom by Nadace Partnerství in Czechia).
- ▶ Indirect: a possibility to register the planting event by other groups, individual in the program's database.
- ▶ Educational activities dedicated to trees (mostly organized in Poland).

Linking the Tree of the Year program with Planting Our Future (case of Poland and partly Slovakia).

Recommendations:

- ▶ Organize a small grants program for planting events to generate more interest and incentives in participating.
- ▶ Incorporate more educational activities/tools to spark children's and young adults' curiosity and kick-start lifelong learning.
- ▶ Involve as many local stakeholders as possible; use existing networks of collaboration; sustain and nourish newer networks beyond the immediate tree-planting events.



4.2 National level

The core of the Planting our Future program are communities (local level), but achieving the goals of the initiative would not be possible without national players.

In Czechia, the partner and supporter on the national level which stands out the most is the **MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT**. The role of the Ministry is important from a political, legislative and financial point of view. Through state funds, the Ministry provides direct financial support to the Czech Planting the Future program. Another important state institution in Czechia is the **State Land Office** (Státní pozemkový úřad) and the **Elbe River Basin state enterprise** (Povodí Labe), the **Vltava River Basin state enterprise** (Povodí Vltavy) and the **Ohře River Basin state enterprise** (Povodí Ohře) which do their own plantings and register some of them in the nationwide program database.

In Poland, the key partner is the **STATE FORESTS** (in Polish: Lasy Państwowe), which owns 20% of Polish land around cities, towns and villages. Besides supporting planting in forest, they also provide saplings to school gardens. They can also support educational activities and give talks on trees and biodiversity. **PROTECTED AREAS** (e.g. the Kampinoski National Park) may play a similar role – as a partner – although perhaps more focused on supporting joint educational activities.

In Slovakia, there are several **PROFESSIONAL NGO PARTNERS** which provide expertise on trees and tree care, such as the Tree Nursery (Ovocná škôlka Biele Karpaty) – an association of professionals, and International Society of Arboriculture in Slovakia (ISA Slovensko) which is involved in evaluation of the grant applications and recommends places for plantings.

At the national level, it is crucial to involve the **PRIVATE SECTOR** in both funding the program as well as active participation of the business partners and staff in planting events. There are two models of working with private donors: in Slovakia with one main general business partner + supporting partners; in Czechia – having a partnership with a number of supporters (both private and institutional). Another type of private sector partner that has proven very effective in Czechia is **ROTARY CLUBS** which have financially supported plantings as well as participated in the events as volunteers.

If we take a look at the composition of partners at both local and national level, in some cases clear benefits come from involving **ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS**, such as universities, which are connected to the places nearest to where the campuses are (mostly in bigger cities). They bring to the table vast expertise and knowledge when it comes to tree care and other important aspects related to a multidisciplinary theme that encompasses trees, biodiversity, climate, water and soil protection. A great example of this collaboration involves Nadace Partnerství and Mendel University in Brno. Representatives of the university are members of expert grant commissions and participate in the evaluation of grant applications. They also help to design new grant calls corresponding to current trends and provide expert supervision of the plantings we organize.

We should also not underestimate the role of **MEDIA** partners as well as some **INDIVIDUAL PERSONS** – people who are known and respected by the public and are able to transfer the positive message to the community and the public – who can effectively act as **AMBASSADORS** of the cause of Planting our Future.

Recommendations:

- ▶ Involve the Ministry of Environment in other countries (if possible).
- ▶ Collaborate with other professional NGO partners and/or academics who have expertise in tree planting, tree care, biodiversity, climate change and related themes.
- ▶ Involve Rotary Clubs and other business networks in the initiative.



4.3 European and global level

It is important that European-based institutions support such programs as Planting Our Future, including the institutions of the European Commission. The Tree of the Year Contest could act as a gateway to new forms of collaboration with Directorate-General for the Environment or the European Environment Agency. At the moment, the Czech partner is the only partner in the program to register tree plantings in the EU 3 Billion Trees database.

Some NGO partners important for the initiative might include:

- ▶ **WWF Central and Eastern Europe (WWF-CEE)** – provides overall leadership and coordination of WWF's commitment in the Danube and Carpathian eco-regions. It is active in seven countries of Central and South-Eastern Europe. WWF-CEE may be a partner in activities related to education, information exchange and promotion of the initiative, as well as an expert partner regarding climate and biodiversity protection (wwfcee.org).
- ▶ **European Greenways Association (EGWA)** – the international organization aims at encouraging the creation and promotion of greenways in Europe. It brings together more than 50 different organizations from 16 European countries involved in the development of greenways. One of the activities that may be linked with EGWA is planting trees along greenways and cycle routes (e.g., planting of trees along the trails, groups of trees near rest points, storytelling and education about iconic trees growing along greenway routes etc. (www.aevv-egwa.org).
- ▶ **Collective Leadership Institute (CLI)** – an organization based in Germany which offers its certification program through open courses, on-site courses, tailor-made solutions, online learning, and the Young Leaders for Sustainability program based on a unique and proven methodology that builds the competence and skillset to effectuate collective leadership, stakeholder collaboration, dialogic and process facilitation, as well as transformative stewardship expertise. Within The Planting Our Future program, we could use the methodology for building and strengthening our network of stakeholders and training a new generation of "agents of change" (www.collectiveleadership.de).

International companies who support planting actions include:

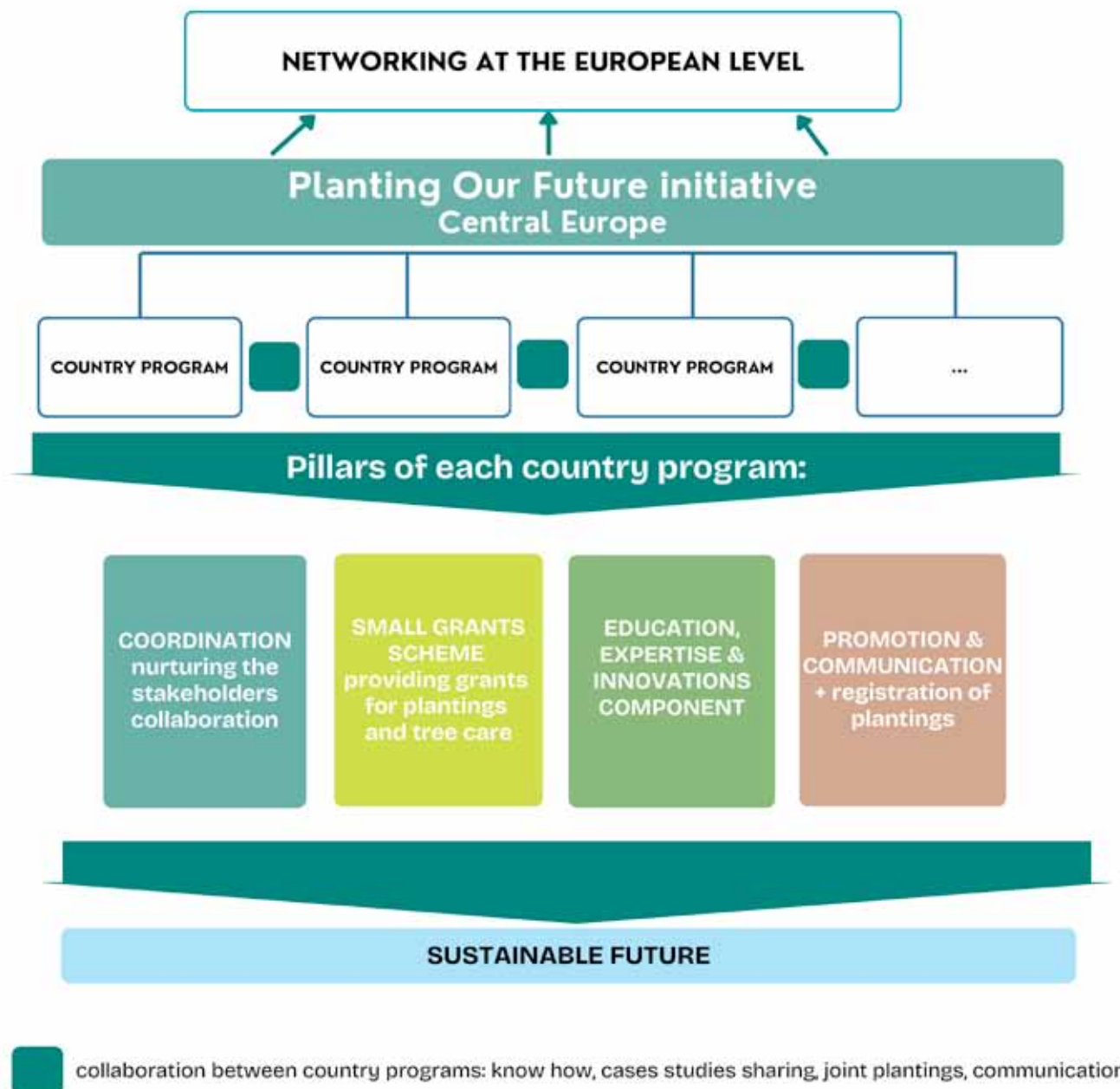
- ▶ **Clean Advantage™** and **GreenPrint™**, two reduced emissions programs in the US (cleanadvantageprogram.com) that supported planting events in Central Europe.
- ▶ **Corporate donors** who operate in Central European countries that might be interested in supporting the initiative.

Recommendations:

- ▶ Introduce a linkage between the Planting Our Future program and the Tree of the Year campaign.
- ▶ Recruit and involve corporate donors to support the initiative on the Central European level.

5. MILESTONES – next steps for the Central European program

- ▶ Defining the common message / statement with the principles and strong emotional affiliation in a form of the **Memorandum of Understanding**.
- ▶ Presentation and promotion of the **Planting Our Future** publication. **Linking communities and strengthening resilience of rural and urban places** to the public and media.
- ▶ Presenting the initiative to the European Tree of the Year national coordinators at the official awards ceremony in the European Parliament.
- ▶ Organizing the individual country programs and – in the case of Poland – preparing the national program for Poland and an action plan on how to collaborate effectively with the business community (feasibility study with experts and marketing specialists).
- ▶ Nurturing the collaboration on the Central European level – continuous exchange of knowledge, case studies/good practices, information and occasional joint projects.
- ▶ Promoting tree plantings as a regional, Central European endeavor – showing symbolic cooperation of partners.



Organizational model of the initiative

1. Planting Our Future initiative at the Central European level is a network of country programs, having linkages to the broader European level, based on common principles.
2. Country programs collaborate with each other through sharing know-how, good practices (case studies), occasional joint/cross-border planting events and communication.
3. Each country program – in an ideal scenario – is based on 4 pillars/components:

- ▶ **COORDINATION** – nurturing the collective collaboration of partners/stakeholders, working with donors and institutional partners.
- ▶ **SMALL GRANTS SCHEME** – providing grants for planting events and tree care to the local communities.
- ▶ **EDUCATION, EXPERTISE & INNOVATION** component – ensuring the expertise on tree care/climate/biodiversity, incorporating educational activities and tools to the planting events, introducing innovative approaches within the whole process of program implementation.
- ▶ **PROMOTION & COMMUNICATION** – working with media, social media, the Ambassadors of the initiative, communication campaigns. The component also includes the necessity to have a platform enabling registration of tree plantings.



Memorandum of Understanding

PLANTING OUR FUTURE
Memorandum of Understanding
Brno, March 6th, 2025

Preamble

We believe that tree planting and tree care is a substantial and meaningful way towards a sustainable future: to make the landscape more beautiful and healthy, more varied and, above all, more resilient to the impacts of climate change. Each tree affects the microclimate, absorbs carbon from the atmosphere and retains water. Each tree creates living conditions for other plants, animals, fungi and microorganisms. Each tree is part of an ecosystem important for our future. Trees are symbols of togetherness and enduring ties between people and nature. Trees are rooted in our culture, art and history, and are witnesses of the past, present and the future. Trees connect people and communities today and over time, across generations; they build relations, bring common value and restore faith in democracy, solidarity and humanity.

The Signatories of this Memorandum

TAKING INTO CONSIDERATION

- local, national, European and global actions and programs on planting and protecting trees that draw on the fundamental efforts to mitigate the effects of climate change, protect biodiversity and landscape through involvement of local communities.
- the European Tree of the Year Contest.

TAKING FULL ACCOUNT of the UN Transforming Our World – The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which defines 17 sustainable development goals,

PURSUANT to the goal of the Planting Our Future initiative:

Our goal is to enhance the resilience of landscapes and cities to the impacts of climate change through community tree planting and follow-up care as well as returning the trees to towns and cities and to the open countryside, and wherever else they are needed.

Have agreed to on the following principles of the Planting Our Future initiative:

1. Planting our Future is a collective initiative about planting trees in open spaces, except for forests – in the countryside and cities, where the trees are needed.
2. We plant native species of trees and those that are adaptive to climate change. The trees come from the regions where planting events are organized.
3. Planting trees does not only contribute to mitigating the effects of and adapting to climate change but also to anti-erosion and biodiversity protection and restoration of the countryside and the urban landscapes.
4. Tree care after planting is an integral part of the initiative.
5. We are focusing our activities on local communities – by involving communities, volunteers, active citizens of all generations. We initiate cooperation with local governments, institutions, schools and business, establishing partnerships between various stakeholders dedicated to planting trees and protecting them.
6. The program has an important educational dimension and environmental education is part of it. It is crucial to raise awareness about the importance of trees.
7. The initiative is based on sharing good practices and knowledge.
8. The long-term principle is to achieve a critical mass of planted trees (excluding forests) as well as a critical mass of knowledge on planting trees, tree care and tree education.
9. Tree planting supports democratic values – it is a very effective way to integrate society on every level and connect people to each other.

Signatories:

Nadace Partnerství, Czechia
 Nadácia Ekopolis, Slovakia
 Klub Gaja, Poland
 Fundusz Partnerstwa, Poland

The Memorandum of Understanding was created as part of the Planting Our Future project supported by the International Visegrad Fund (2024-2025).

We invite all the organizations and institutions that endorse the Memorandum to sign it.



APPENDIX

The “Planting Our Future” project was supported by the **International Visegrad Fund** and implemented in the October 2024 – March 2025 timeframe.

Main project activities:

1. Inaugural planting events

- ▶ **Poland** / Bielsko-Biała
Tree Day in the Secret Garden of the historical Jewish Cemetery / 7.10.2024
- ▶ **Slovakia** / Nová Bystrica
Planting trees at the school and along the bicycle path / 11.10.2024
- ▶ **Czech Republic** / Broumovsko
Planting the Freedom Avenue / 9.11.2024



Some reflections on the planting events:

Authenticity: Authentic community-driven actions involving partners from each sector. Dominika

Cooperation: Use the positive energy of local communities to build partnerships with various partners – public sector, private sector. Ana

Inspiration: Involving the President of the Czech Republic and his wife sets a positive example and a clear message to the whole nation. Katarzyna

Common experience: Planting events brings to the fore a special kind of feeling of common sense in the community, on which it is possible to build for future projects. Mirek

Model: Along with building on the energy of partners, the systematic approach is implemented. Peter

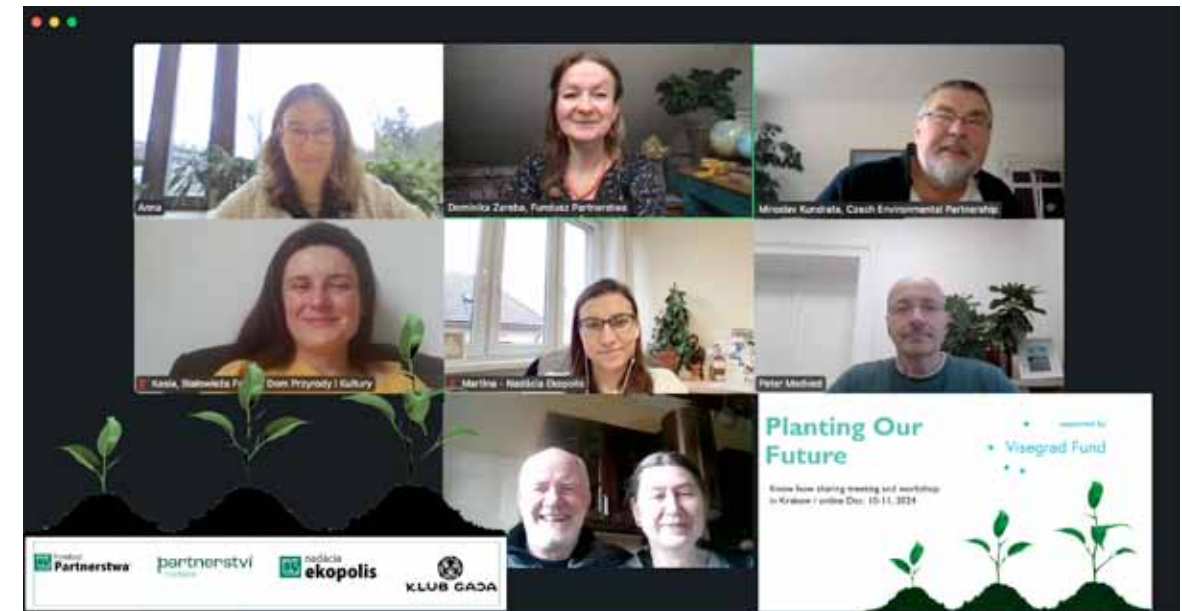
Shared values: Different approaches to planting events but shared deep values. Jacek

Linking generations: Involving young and senior members of the society, building bonds. Martina

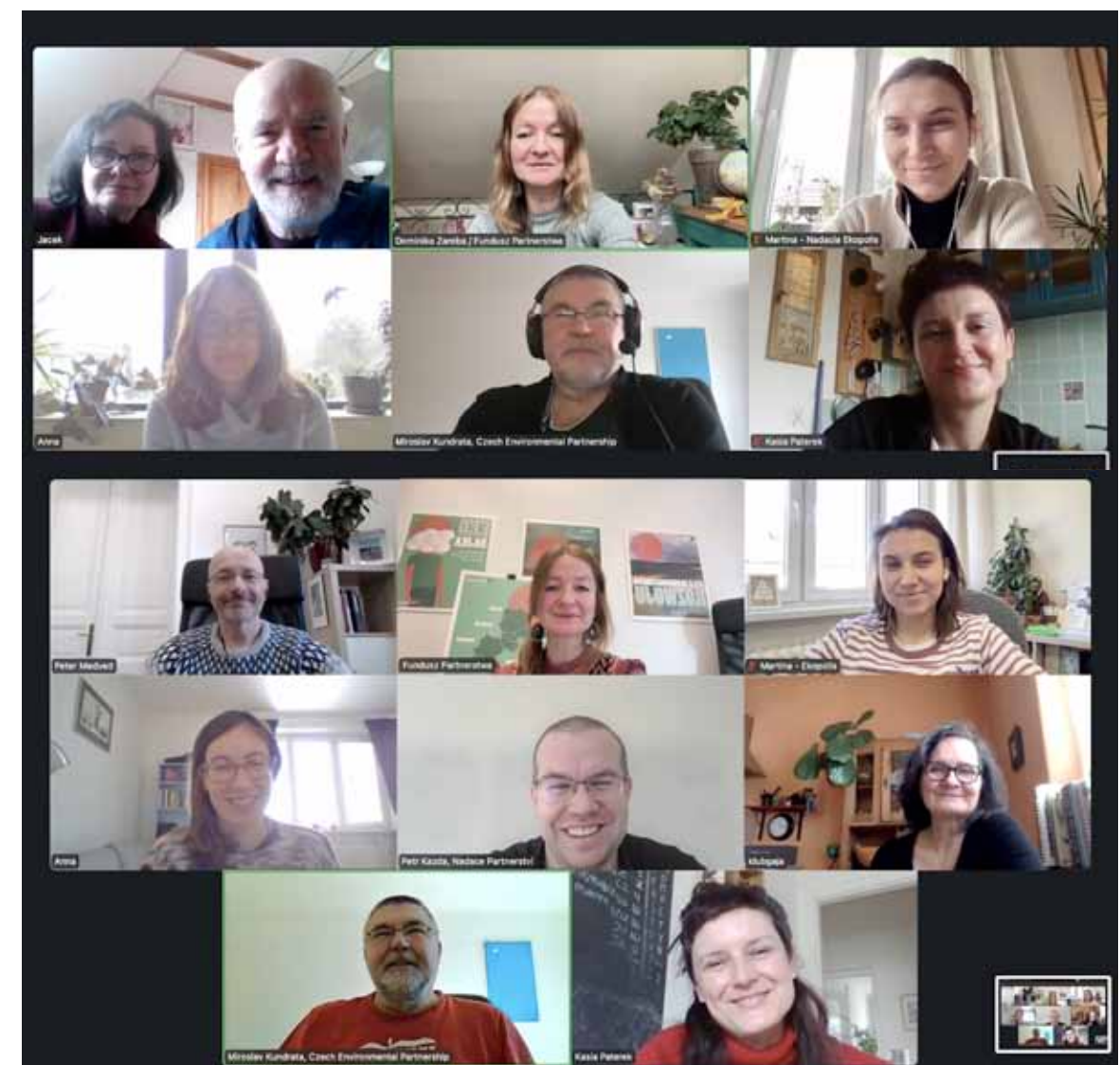
Positive narrative: The new positive message for the public on how to speak about trees and why to take care of them. Beata

EU level: Potential of spreading Planting for the Future programs on the European level. Mirek

2. **Online workshop in Krakow**, 10–11th of December 2024 in order to exchange know how on planting programs in Poland, Czechia and Slovakia.



3. **A series of online meetings** to develop the Planting Our Future Strategy: 21st of January, 28th of January and 4th of February 2025.



4. Arbor Conference in Brno on 6th of March 2025 (Czechia) and dissemination of project ideas and outputs. Meeting of project partners 5-7.03 2025.



The “Planting Our Future” project, supported by the International Visegrad Fund, aims to stimulate the exchange of know-how about tree planting programs in the Czechia, Slovakia and Poland. A major outcome of the project is a common CZ-SK-PL Strategy for Planting Our Future that can be applied across Europe.

- Visegrad Fund

Partners:



Planting events in Autumn 2024 were co-financed by the Clean Advantage and Green Print programs.

