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About ETRI Group

The Etri Group operates in the field of ecology, ergonomics and ethical economics and is focused on the person within the process. It comprises seven legal entities employing 70 people. “We employ groups that were recently considered unemployable: autistic individuals, the deaf, the blind, schizophrenics, and others facing psychological or different challenges,” says the founder of the Etri Group, social innovator Lenka Puh, who writes this story with incredible enthusiasm. The first company in the group, Jazon, holds the status of a disabled company and has been operating for over 33 years, while other legal entities in the group include associations, social institutions, and a cooperative established since 2012. In 2022, they collectively generated just under a million euros in revenue.

Of all employees, 75 percent are from less employable, vulnerable groups. “We argue that someone, even if they are almost non-productive, has the right to employment,” emphasizes Lenka Puh, highlighting the importance of social inclusion through work.

The PRINCIPLES of creating an inclusive society through job creation for all.

Based on Etri Principles they co-create stories of integration, promoting a more inclusive society with jobs for all and a sustainable future for Slovenia. Traceability of ingredients, sources and processes applied. Sustainability in terms of innovation, nature & culture preservation. Integrity in terms of transparency and corporate governance. Inclusivity of disadvantaged and vulnerable groups, local community & human-centered processes. In ETRI group they integrate and embed Etri principles in daily operations, processes, how they define methodologies, supervision and control in building sustainable operations that bring results, a measurable social impact and transformation of society.

DIGNITY

Human dignity is the foundation of their actions. They consistently advocate for the respect of human rights, believing that every individual can find their place under the sun and a job that fulfills them, enabling both career and personal development.

RESPONSIBILITY

Operating within a community means taking responsibility. Firstly, to oneself, fellow humans, the company, the local community, the environment, and cultural heritage. They responsibly contribute to the sustainable development of the company and society.

FAIRNESS

Open and respectful relationships with colleagues, customers, suppliers, manufacturers, partners, communities, and society are the cornerstone of our business.

TRANSPARENCY AND RELIABILITY

Respecting legal regulations, the interests of their partners, and other stakeholders, they aim to contribute to building an inclusive society and a competitive sustainable economy and society.

About Lenka Puh

Lenka Puh is a socially responsible entrepreneur and social innovator who places the humanization of workplaces and work as a fundamental human need and right at the forefront of her activities. In 1989, she founded the company Jazon d.o.o., which has consistently focused on supplying organizations with products and services. Since 2005, it has also been recognized as a disabled-friendly company. Lenka



ka is a certified consultant according to the German Quality Office standard in the field of ergonomics. In addition to her core mission of optimizing work processes and reducing costs, she provides advice in the field of preventive measures for healthy workplaces, with an emphasis on building inclusive employment.

She is the author of standards on the flow of patient documentation, a project leader in the field of the labour market, and the employment of vulnerable target groups. Throughout the years, Lenka has been actively involved in sustainable development and the creation of projects characterized by innovation, reuse, and the employment of vulnerable groups. Jazon is a promoter of the circular economy in Slovenia and a pioneer in defining the approach to people, striving to create green jobs. In 2014, Lenka Puh was honoured as an honorary member of Innovators of Slovenia.

METHODOLOGY

Oak adapts to the needs of each challenge, question, or support requirement of an individual expert, innovator, or team.

A system of companies and organizations, represented by an **apple tree**, implementing sustainable business models and achieving business results for job creation and preservation, while the juniper represents environmentally friendly development of new entrepreneurial ideas in nature.

The Etri Group is keen on establishing a startup community through its co-factory model, aiding companies in launching their operations and inspiring them to embrace social innovation for the enhancement of their co-entrepreneurial model. The **Juniper** functions as a Hub for transferring new knowledge to the market, playing a pivotal role in a development research community dedicated to nature-friendly growth and the cultivation of innovative entrepreneurial ideas that encourage a distinct approach to development.



On all three trees, regular events take place as part of **LinkPoints** (Povezovalnice) – this is an approach that adapts to stakeholders and always aims to generate ideas, conclusions, and approaches.



Oak tree

A development research community to build an inclusive human long-living society.

Apple tree

A system of companies and organizations implementing sustainable business models and achieving business results for job creation.



Juniper

The development research community for nature friendly development and the development of new entrepreneurial ideas that contribute to the realization of a different attitude to growth.



5 Circular Stories (Partnership for an Inclusive Society, NGO Network for Circular Economy, Make in Slovenia, Don't waste Good food, Flora Viva)

Circular stories are collaborations for a sustainable future. In Etri Group's circular stories, they address societal change, a product, or a service that emerges through collaboration among various stakeholders with a common goal and aligned interests—to create changes in society across different sustainability domains. Circular stories operate based on Etri principles and represent the implementation of a solution for a recognized community or social challenge through collaboration, learning, and piloting. The goal of circular stories is to create measurable social impacts among connected stakeholders and in the broader society, presenting guidelines and opportunities for environmentally and socially friendly operational changes. The ultimate outcome of a circular story is the defined common goal or solution for the presented challenge.

Partnership for an Inclusive Society

It addresses the social need for building an inclusive society for socially excluded groups in local communities by creating opportunities and tailor-made jobs, as well as exploring new opportunities for implementing social responsibility, collaboration, and cooperation for sustainable development. It focuses on reducing prejudices and stereotypical thinking, using an approach of cross-sectoral collaboration and the development of community services. To acquire key professional knowledge in innovative and interdisciplinary exploration, new forms of collaboration for sustainable development and an inclusive society are used (LinkPoints - Povezovalnica).

- To reduce prejudices and stereotypical thinking.
- To build an inclusive society for socially excluded groups in local communities.

- + To formulate guidelines, models, and develop work processes for vulnerable groups.
- + To strengthen cross-sectoral collaboration and develop community services.
- + To acquire key professional knowledge in innovative and interdisciplinary exploration of new forms of collaboration for sustainable development and an inclusive society.

Network of NGOs for Circular Economy

Connecting non-governmental organizations operating in the field of sustainable development and circular economy, the network aims to change consumer habits, society, and the economy through collaborative efforts and the implementation of circular narratives to address challenges in various sustainability areas.

ADVANTAGES OF NETWORKING:

- + Membership in the network without membership fees.
- + Joint applications for funding opportunities.
- + Advocacy and operational support for implementing changes in society and other sectors.
- + Democratic influence on the network's plans and mission.

Don't waste Good food

Development of processes in the production and processing of food and the consumption of potential surpluses. Operating in a specific space, with equipment and knowledge that enables new scenarios in the food supply chain and the development of new products from a collaborative business model. From food that likely would not reach the shelves, new value is created, providing opportunities for new jobs and the construction of an inclusive society.



Etri, the innovative project tackling food waste, is led by a team dedicated to addressing the dual challenge of vast food wastage and food insecurity. Project manager Barbara Grintal emphasizes the urgent need to rectify this imbalance and elevate the culture of eating. At Etri, they source surplus food from various companies, preventing it from ending up in landfills. Dino Demič, a food technologist and Etri's production and development manager, details their efforts, transforming discarded bread into items such as dumplings, savory and sweet bread puddings, granola, and cookies. This sustainable approach ensures that food, which would otherwise be wasted, becomes nourishing meals. Etri distributes these meals, serving a segment to students and staff at the Biotechnical Faculty and providing the rest to the Pod strehco Institute in Moste, where the elderly and those in need receive free, quality meals. Project collaborator Maja Milošević Čustić notes a growing number of elderly individuals seeking not just sustenance but also social interaction through the initiative. Looking forward, Etri aims to extend their reach, delivering meals directly to the homes of elderly individuals unable to visit their facility.

Lunches for businesses and the funding for their charitable activities at Etri come from various sources, including offering companies lunches made from the ingredients that would otherwise be discarded. Maruša Dovič, responsible for sales in the company, explains,

“Etri offers companies the setup of an ‘Etri point,’ a sort of tea kitchen equipped for employees to heat or finish pre-prepared meals.” Etri supplies this point with monthly meals for the employees, including soups and stews with extended shelf life, sterilized, and some even fermented in their “Mini Factory.” All the products are packaged in environmentally friendly packaging or glass jars returned through a deposit system. Dovič highlights that companies collaborating with Etri gain value by contributing to society and simultaneously enhancing the satisfaction, health, and productivity of their employees, which explains the increasing number of orders. Etri’s “purchase with purpose” service means that part of the funds is allocated for free meals. “The more orders Etri has, the more they can donate to seniors on the margins of society,” she describes the concept of their work.

Food waste processing is just one of Etri’s stories. They are also involved in removing invasive plants, transforming discarded textiles into new clothing, preserving Slovenian cereal varieties incorporated into their products, and innovation. Among Etri’s employees is Taj Clar, who invented chickpea ice cream in various flavors, including Oreo and Smoki.

Etri Group also collaborates on the project “Decarbonize Slovenia” with a model for a systemic transition to a circular, regenerative, and low-carbon Slovenia. With their experience, Etri contributes to the development of more sustainable practices at the policy and long-term strategy levels. Learn more about this and other projects Etri is undertaking in a video report at the top of the article. They refer to themselves as a “living laboratory” since the business practices they implement in Etri are transferred to other larger companies.

Make in Slovenia

Promoter of tradition, sustainability, and social responsibility in the Slovenian fashion sector and other traditional industries. Encouraging responsible procurement and production with embedded sustainability in systems, organizations, and individuals. Attracting and connecting the creative world with production, aiming to make production jobs those that provide work for various individuals in the community, thus contributing to economic and community development.



Flora Viva

Enhancing the knowledge and competencies of employees while engaging in activities related to seed cultivation, invasive plant control, and prevention of habitat overgrowth is a key focus. This initiative extends to fostering biodiversity, encompassing both natural environments and agricultural spaces. Additionally, there is an emphasis on promoting awareness that individual contributions through behaviour, work practices, and dietary habits can collectively contribute to enhancing climate change resilience. The comprehensive approach involves not only the professional development of staff but also active participation in sustainable practices across seed production and ecological conservation efforts.

The Mini Food factory (in collaboration with Lidl Slovenia)

On April 24th, 2023, during the Slovenian Day Without Food Waste, the Etri Group unveiled the Mini Factory—a groundbreaking concept for a processing plant dedicated to exploring alternative strategies for handling potential food surpluses. The presentation unfolded at the Ljubljana Biotechnical Faculty unit in Rodica near Domžale, marking a pivotal moment in addressing the pressing issue of food waste.

The primary mission of the day was to foster collaboration among families, individuals, businesses, and institutions, both public and private, with the shared goal of minimizing food waste. Despite numerous efforts, the majority of waste still originates in households. Alarming statistics from 2013 reveal that Slovenia discarded 118,000 tons of food, and by 2021, this figure surged to 143,000 tons—an average of 68 kilograms of food per person per year.

The initiators underscored a crucial point: people often remain oblivious to the staggering quantities of wasted food, yet this poses a severe threat to the environment. The repercussions include heightened greenhouse gas emissions, the endangerment of plant and animal species, soil degradation, and the squandering of substantial amounts of water and energy used in food production.

Breda Krašna, the Secretary-General of the Friends of Youth Association Slovenia, stressed the value of providing assistance through food vouchers and emphasized the significance of educating families for more discerning and rational shopping practices.



Lenka Puh from the Etri Group stresses the intricacies of professionally managing food surpluses while adhering to stringent standards—a formidable challenge. She highlights the imperative role played by a creative team and strategic networking, citing the Mini Factory as a noteworthy example. Through seamless connections

between stores, farmers, and smaller producers aligned with market needs, the Mini Factory crafts a diverse range of products. These include wraps, sandwiches, soups, salads, pies, jams, tea, and the innovative creamy chickpea ice cream.



Operated within the framework of the Allium social cooperative and employment center, the Mini Factory extends its commitment to lifelong education and ensuring a dignified lifestyle for its employees. Dino Demič, a technological leader in the development and production of the No Food Waste story, underscores the immense potential in leveraging technological processes to curtail food surpluses while concurrently creating novel and captivating products.

Acknowledged as an innovative processing plant concept, the Mini Factory strives to mitigate food waste in stores, among farmers, and smaller producers. Its endeavours contribute to the formulation of alternative scenarios for managing potential food surpluses, championing sustainability, and upholding environmental responsibility.

Other initiatives

Etri group works under a common mission and vision to grow circular food solutions using new digital tools, by acting local and going global and by developing an appropriate impact measurement model. Currently they are measuring their impact with their new currency, named Yuhca (soup in Slovene language).

Pokušina pod strehco is community kitchen run in collaboration with Red Cross Slovenia. They distribute cooked meals and fresh food donations to people in need. They also organize cooking courses on how to prepare healthy meals.

How to present and engage national, regional and local policy actors in creating new supporting policies?

Etri Group and Lenka Puh are very actively pursuing the goal of putting as many pilot projects they implement into the system. Many of their initiatives are already supported by local, regional or national public authorities. Some of the projects have also been successful in becoming a nationally recognized approach. But to continue on this path, they will also work on the below activities:

Highlight Social Inclusion Impact:

Emphasize the Etri Group's commitment to employing individuals from vulnerable groups, such as autistic individuals, the deaf, the blind, and those with psychological challenges. Illustrate the positive impact on social inclusion and how this aligns with broader societal goals.

Demonstrate Economic Contribution:

Showcase the economic success of the Etri Group, which generated just under a million euros in revenue in 2022. Highlight the potential economic benefits of supporting initiatives that employ individuals from less employable, vulnerable groups.

Promote Circular Economy Principles:

Emphasize the Etri principles related to traceability of ingredients, sustainability, integrity, and inclusivity. Illustrate how these principles align with the goals of a circular economy, contributing to sustainable development and a competitive, sustainable economy.

Link with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):

Clearly articulate how the Etri Group's initiatives contribute to achieving specific SDGs, such as Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and Goal 10 (Reduced Inequality). Showcase the relevance of these initiatives in addressing broader societal challenges.

Engage in Public-Private Partnerships:

Propose collaborative initiatives between the Etri Group and public authorities. Highlight the potential for public-private partnerships to achieve shared goals related to social inclusion, job creation, and sustainable development.

Educate on Food Waste Reduction:

Focus on the No Food Waste initiative and its innovative approach to tackling food waste. Communicate the environmental and social benefits of reducing food waste, emphasizing the potential for collaboration in implementing similar initiatives at a broader scale.

Align with Existing Policies:

Showcase how the Etri principles align with existing national, regional, and local policies related to social inclusion, sustainable development, and circular economy practices. Position the initiatives as complementary to existing efforts.

Offer Expertise and Collaboration:

Express the Etri Group's willingness to share expertise and collaborate with public authorities in developing and implementing supportive policies. Highlight the success of the Mini Factory and its potential as a model for managing food surpluses.

Utilize Case Studies:

Develop case studies that showcase the positive outcomes and societal impact of Etri's initiatives. Use these case studies to illustrate the replicability and scalability of the projects for broader policy implementation.

In conclusion

The Etri Group stands as a beacon of innovation and social responsibility, embodying principles that transcend business success to create a positive societal impact. By seamlessly integrating inclusivity, sustainability, and economic growth, the Etri Group's initiatives offer a compelling model for shaping a more equitable and resilient future.

The principles of dignity, responsibility, fairness, transparency, and reliability, championed by the Etri Group, exemplify a holistic approach to fostering a work environment that not only sustains businesses but also uplifts individuals from vulnerable communities. This commitment is not only commendable but aligns with global aspirations, such as the Sustainable Development Goals.

The Mini Factory, a testament to the Etri Group's commitment to reducing food waste, is a pioneering effort that challenges traditional norms. Its success story serves as an inspiration, demonstrating the potential for transformative change when driven by purpose, creativity, and a collaborative spirit.

As we navigate toward a more sustainable and inclusive future, the Etri Group endeavours become not just a local success but a universal blueprint for meaningful change. By engaging national, regional, and local public authorities, we can unlock the full potential of these initiatives, creating an ecosystem where social impact and economic growth coexist harmoniously.

