

## **The Bologna ROCK Hackathon 2018 inspires students and young eco-entrepreneurs to tackle the city's sustainability challenges through social businesses**

As part of the **Horizon 2020 ROCK Project** and the [Sustainable Development Festival 2018](#), the Bologna ROCK Hackathon 2018 brought together a dozen university students, young professionals and entrepreneurs during an weekend-long (May 26-27) co-creation marathon aimed at, firstly, raising awareness on the city's sustainability challenges, providing a skills-based training them on eco-entrepreneurship and sustainable business innovation, and boosting collaborative, multi-stakeholder networks; all key levers for inclusive and effective local solutions to global challenges like climate change and socio-economic inequalities.

In truly cooperative fashion, the hackathon itself was a joint effort by **UNIBO - Green Office** (the University of Bologna's new sustainability hub), the "**Fondazione per l'Innovazione Urbana**" and the **Municipality of Bologna** (COBO), in partnership with **Climate-KIC Italy**, **Kilowatt** and **Ecopreneurs for the Climate**. Moreover, it was framed within the [Young Ecopreneurs Climathons 2018](#), a global initiative encompassing green hackathons in many cities around the world, happening throughout the spring and autumn, and concluding at the 2018 Global Week of Ecopreneurs and Cities for the Climate on November 5-11, and at the 2018 UN Climate Change Conference (COP24) in Katowice (Poland) on December 3-14.

Over the course of the weekend, participants followed an exploratory **journey** into the inner workings of eco-entrepreneurship as a potent tool for sustainable value creation and economic regeneration; guided by SwitchMed.eu Green Entrepreneurship Methodology; and facilitated by Jesus Iglesias from Ecopreneurs for the Climate and Sara Pennellini from UNIBO - Green Office. After a context-setting introduction, an initial group brainstorming session led to the identification of the city's most pressing **environmental and social challenges**, with 3 being democratically selected, and complementary teams set up around them: consumerism, food waste, and packaging waste. Digging deeper, their root causes and main consequences were examined and turned into the drivers behind the social enterprises (why): their objectives, mission and vision. At this stage, participants were quick to grab the fundamental notion at the heart of it all: social businesses are purpose-driven, exist to and only to tackle and eventually contribute to solving a certain sustainability issue. In this sense, the business model (how) provides a means to an end, a way to achieve viability and maximize the impact of the whole venture.

The next stage concerned the **stakeholders** (who & whom), or those key players, mostly on the local level, whose engagement is essential for the project's success, either because they share the same expletives (alignment) or because they are highly influential in the field at hand. They were categorized into partners, beneficiaries, customers and others, depending on the engagement levels presupposed (hypothesis), which in turn varies with the value generated, and also on their willingness and capacity to contribute with cash to the exchange (customers). At this stage, participants were able to map and select the city's most relevant organizations, both on the private and public spheres, in relation with their driving challenges. In most cases, logically, the university (UNIBO), the municipality (COBO) and sector-specific NGOs, particularly student-led or student-oriented, came up on top.

Moving into solution development, the **value proposition** was co-created together with both (potential) partners and customers, taking the shape of a collection of products and/or services that renders the project's value tangible and delivers it to the beneficiaries and customers, in cooperation with the partners, and in order to achieve the objectives set. Up until that point, the whole analysis remained on the theoretical realm, based on a priori information. So next up, prototypes were built to capture and transport the value proposition. In its simplest form a prototype of this nature consists just in an elegant and target-focused elevator pitch. In the online world, a landing page or a Facebook group can do the job as well. In the physical one, particularly when dealing with products, small-scale, low-cost versions can help convey the message in a visual manner. Such was the case of the "packaging waste" team, who put together a cool recyclable bottle, while all groups worked on their branding, drawing appealing slogans out of their value propositions, and even coming up with catchy project names.

All in one piece, here are the **3 projects**, their driving challenges, names, slogans and value propositions:

- [consumerism] **IShare** - *Do You?* An online community for the exchange of objects of non-daily use between individuals, in order to reduce consumption, trigger interaction and promote integration
- [packaging waste] **BACKBO** - *The void to be filled in the university area:* A circular-collaborative Living lab in the university area, where businesses, citizens and the municipality join forces to recover single-use packaging and create reusable objects.
- [food waste] **PlanEat** - *Rely on expert nutritionists for an efficient, fast and affordable shopping:* a mobile-phone app plus consulting services aimed at

helping people nurture healthy eating habits, and avoid food waste creation, through a personalized shopping list

The true function of a prototype though is to enable hypotheses validation via **tests** in real-life situations, as close to a market environment as possible. In our case, the value proposition encompasses 3 types of hypotheses to be put to the test: the actual value created and perceived by customers and beneficiaries; the interest, alignment and engagement of partners; and our joint (founders plus ecosystem of partners) capacity to achieve the objectives. In short, the teams set out to gather meaningful feedback (sufficient and valid samples) from their project's stakeholders, considering the limiting time and availability constraints of having just a few hours, on a Sunday, at their disposal. Yet, they quickly turned challenges into opportunities, and made effective use of today's technologies, to reach out to and interview both potential partners, users (beneficiaries) and even customers. Through online surveys sent out via Facebook groups, mailings, Whatsapp, etc. And yes, they also embraced the good old-fashioned way: face-to-face interactions. More real and particularly relevant for locally-minded social businesses. Out they went, around the university area, taking advantage of the relaxed mood of lunch-time on a pre-summer Sunday. Up to some eighty something responses they got, in some instances. Amazing work!

Back to the headquarters, results were shared with peers and assessed collectively, drawing lessons to be learned, and spotting **areas for improvement**, which they gladly looked into and exploited in the last working session of the marathon-like weekend. Right afterwards, they processed and structured their projects' founding pillars into the Green Business Canvas, and prepared a synthetic presentation to pitch their intense 2-day journey, as well as the steps ahead, to the honorable jury that joined up in the late afternoon: Alessandra Bonoli from **UNIBO - Green Office**, Nicoletta Tranquillo from [Kilowatt](#), and Marina Kovari from [Climate-KIC Italy](#). Alessandra, Nicoletta and Marina listened carefully, posed pertinent questions, and provided very valuable feedback to all participants. One winner had to be selected, for the mere sake of the competition, and it was ... **BACKBO!**, whose founders will be taking part next week in the [Forum of Cities](#) in Madrid, in a [gathering](#) with their peers and stakeholders from the rest of the cities having held events so far within the Young Ecopreneurs Climathons 2018, that is Madrid, Seville, Malaga, Oviedo in Spain, and Bologna in Italy.

Last but not least, there was yet another opportunity to present and formally launch the projects, this time in front of the larger audience of the whole city and particularly the student community, at the magnificent Piazza Giuseppe Verdi, right at the heart of the university area.

Looking ahead, as intended, support for the **continuing development** of the projects in the months to come, was offered by Kilowatt, Climate-KIC Italy, and UNIBO - Green Office together with Ecopreneurs for the Climate, within the framework of their current incubation and follow-up programs, including ROCK itself. More detailed information on this will be announced in the next few days.

Next steps to come soon! Andiamo avanti, green Bologna!