



Thanks to help from the EU, Slovak “Molehouses” are popping up all over Europe

A big house without the big energy bills, a minimal carbon footprint and maximum harmony with nature. All this might sound like an eco-fantasy, but it’s real. The Molehouse proves it: a self-sufficient passive house with a grassy roof. The first of these earth-covered homes was built in the Záhorie region of Slovakia. Today, thanks to support from the Enterprise Europe Network, the largest global network supporting small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and co-financed by the EU, architects from all corners of Europe are joining the founders of the association.

The story of the Molehouse began in 2010. Even though it was shortly after the financial crises and conditions for entrepreneurs were quite unfavourable, Martin Pribila decided it was finally time to make his student dream a reality: building ecological homes surrounded by nature. A friend once jokingly remarked over a glass of wine that his houses looked a lot like molehills – hence the name Molehouse.

The basic idea of this house is that it is surrounded by earth on two to three sides and its roof is covered by a top layer of soil. As a result, its temperature is stable, so there is no need to keep it cool in summer, and in winter it requires much less heating – and a shorter heating time. The Molehouse has a grass roof which absorbs CO₂ and can hold up to 95% of the precipitation that falls on the property.

The Enterprise Europe Network helped Molehouse look for international partners

Martin Pribila had several problems when he started his business. It took him a long time to build his first house – and he made a big loss on it. “They taught us how to build at school, but I didn’t know the business side of things. I didn’t know what I was doing and I made some big mistakes at first,” is how Martin Pribila describes his early beginnings.

The situation was also similar later on, when he decided that he would like to take his houses to other countries – but he didn’t know how. It was in training for entrepreneurs that he found out about the Enterprise Europe Network. Its local office, the Bratislava-based Slovak Business Agency, provided him with individual guidance. They arranged for him to participate in various seminars, conferences and B2B cooperative events which connected him with foreign business partners – from architects and real estate firms to material suppliers.

Publishing his profile in POD (the Partnering Opportunities Database) on the Enterprise Europe Network website (www.een.sk) was a big help in his effort to make these special ecological houses available outside of his country. “This is a database through which small and medium-sized enterprises in the European Union as well as neighbouring countries can find business partners or join international projects. As soon as we set up his profile, he started getting calls from companies and entrepreneurs interested in collaboration and that has continued ever since,” explains Oľga Némethová, international support manager

at the Slovak Business Agency, which brings the services of the Enterprise Europe Network to Slovakia.

“We are currently building a house in Hungary, and if I hadn’t found a Hungarian structural engineer through a B2B cooperation event, we never would have been able to get the project off the ground. It is very difficult to get anything done without a partner in the relevant country who knows the local language,” says the Molehouse founder.

His partnership with the Enterprise Europe Network continues

Molehouses are currently being built or are already standing all around Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Austria and, as mentioned previously, Hungary. However, in the near future, the company is going to expand to Poland, Germany, Italy, Croatia and Slovenia.

“Thanks to our profile in POD on the Enterprise Europe Network website (www.een.sk), seven more potential partners have recently contacted me, hailing from Ukraine, Estonia, Latvia and other countries. It has gained momentum, and it looks like we will be able to expand into a great many countries in the European Union,” Pribila continues. He also adds that his partnership

with Enterprise Europe Network is not over, there are still big potential markets that do not know about Molehouses yet. Oľga Némethová of the Slovak Business Agency, which is a partner of the Enterprise Europe Network, is arranging for Martin Pribila to participate in new B2B meetings and conferences in other countries which could be relevant to him. These are useful not only for new contacts, but also for information on the latest developments in the industry. “In these events, I have learned about new materials which otherwise it would not have occurred to me to look for. Because of this, I am planning to continue to participate and am enthusiastically recommending it to other entrepreneurs as well,” the Molehouse founder concludes.

Disclaimer

The interviews with the SME owners and the Enterprise Europe Network were concluded before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to a difficult situation for many European businesses.

Since the outbreak of the pandemic, the European Union has launched a close partnership with member states in order to support the economy and protect businesses such as MultiplexDX and is introducing supportive measures and COVID-19 recovery plans. Read more on the [coronavirus response](#) and the [coronavirus recovery plan for Europe](#).

About the Enterprise Europe Network

The Enterprise Europe Network is the largest network for supporting small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) with multi-national ambitions. It brings together more than 600 member organisations in more than 60 countries and provides them with advice and support in order to help SMEs to expand, gain access to financing, understand EU statutory regulations and find business partners both inside and outside of Europe. The European Commission launched the Enterprise Europe Network in 2008. It is co-financed as part of the EU’s [Competitiveness of Enterprises and Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises programme](#) (COSME).

Further information: www.een.sk



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